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The Voice of the Prayer-Book

"My voice shalt Thou hear betimes, O Lord: early in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up."—PSA. v. 3.

THE VOICE OF THE PRAYER-BOOK

Being Spiritual Addresses

Bearing on the Book of Common Prayer

BY THE REV.

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TO THE

CHURCHWARDENS AND PARISHIONERS

OF S. MATTHIAS, MALVERN LINK,

THESE ADDRESSES,

DELIVERED IN SUBSTANCE IN THEIR CHURCH,

ARE DEDICATED

BY

THEIR LATE VICAR,

IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE OF

TEN YEARS' COMMON USE OF

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

PREFACE

THE appearance of these short addresses perhaps needs some apology, as adding one more to a somewhat numerous family of books of the kind.

The only excuse which can be offered is, that the aim of this little volume is primarily devotional, and that anything which is said as to the history or structure of the several offices is designed to be subservient to that end, and not to repeat in other words that which has been said better and with more authority before.

Enough, however, it is hoped, has been advanced, in the way of instruction, to give sufficient scope to the under-

standing to play its great part, in concert with the affections and the will, in offering up to God an acceptable service, in a form of devotion which makes such large demands upon the intellect, as does the Prayer-Book.

I wish, in conclusion, to express my indebtedness to Dr. J. H. Blunt's "Annotated Prayer-Book," and also to others, from whom, if not acknowledged in the text, I may have, consciously or unconsciously, borrowed ideas.

W. C. E. N.

ELY,
October, 1889.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	Matins	1
II.	Evensong	14
III.	The Athanasian Creed	23
IV.	The Litany	36
V.	The Holy Communion	47
VI.	Holy Baptism	59
VII.	Confirmation	69
VIII.	Holy Matrimony	79
IX.	The Office for the Visitation of the Sick	90
X.	The Burial of the Dead	100
XI.	The Commination Service	111
XII.	Ordination Services	121

I.

Matins.

"What mean ye by this service?"—EXOD. xii. 26.

THERE are now many parishes, thank God, in England, where the church bell rings out every day to invite the people to service. What response it meets with, is not the question before us; but rather, what the benefit might be to those who profit by the invitation—the answer, in fact, to the words of Holy Scripture quoted above, "What mean ye by this service?"

Now, this is a question which some ask captiously, and some pityingly, and some anxiously, and some sincerely. What do you mean by the daily service, in a busy age like this, when all thoughtful men should be spending themselves in the service of humanity? Is not such a service as the daily Matins monotonous? Is not it simply a form, and

nothing more? Would not the clergy be doing better in spending their time in visiting the sick, or in parish duties? We are again and again reminded that going to church will not save a man. A service like this has not even the merit of the special sanction of our Blessed Lord, such as the Holy Eucharist possesses. It is too long, too difficult, too intellectual, for the ordinary man. "What mean ye by this service?"

These objections are put down in the same haphazard way in which they meet us in everyday life. And if they are only just glanced at in way of explanation, it is that we may be able the better to address ourselves to the more important *rationale* of the service when they have been dismissed.

First of all, then, what we mean by this service is the discharge of a plain and simple duty on the part of the clergy—a duty about which there cannot be two opinions. The Prayer-book says distinctly, "All Priests and Deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer either privately or openly, not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause. And the Curate that ministereth in every Parish Church or Chapel, being at home, and not being otherwise reasonably

hindered, shall say the same in the Parish Church or Chapel where he ministereth, and shall cause a Bell to be tolled thereunto a convenient time before he begin, that the people may come to hear God's Word, and to pray with him."[1]

As to another objection, which deprecates spending time in church which might be more profitably spent elsewhere; that, again, is a question which depends a good deal on the value which we attach to prayer. Without doubt, an army can march much faster without its transport and its ammunition, its hospital-train or its commissariat; but a wise general knows that it is one thing to bring up an army, and another thing to bring it up properly equipped. Certainly it would seem that one hour spent by a parish priest among his people, if first his work had been sanctified with prayer, and if he were armed with the Spirit of God, would be of more avail than thrice the time occupied in mere fussy labour, without God, and unilluminated by His help.

Again, any reasonable person would assert that prayer in itself is work, hard work, important work; one of the chief duties, indeed,

[1] Book of Common Prayer.

of the parish priest, that he may offer intercession for the people in union with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And yet once more: time can never be misspent by any one, which is spent in devotion; and there is no one who comes to church, seeking after God and His righteousness, who goes empty away; nay, rather, who is not filled with good things.

As to the particular service before us, "The Order for Morning Prayer, daily throughout the Year" ("or Matins," as it is called in the Calendar, according to its Latin abbreviation), it may be conceded at once that it is not the service which Christ ordained Himself; that being, as is well known, the Holy Eucharist. But Matins is not meant to supersede, but to supplement, that higher and noble service. To be able to enter into such a service as this, is no bad preparation for that more solemn and more awful service of Holy Communion. If any find it dull or troublesome, it is only because they have not entered into its meaning and purpose. Anything is dull to those who do not understand it, or try to enter into it. If any complain of monotony,—after all, our wants are monotonous, our troubles are monotonous, our needs are monotonous, our life is monotonous; that is to say, in our daily

struggle after God, it harps on one note, and emits one strain, while change and variety and restlessness are too often notes and signs of a heart not at peace with itself.

Is, then, this Morning Service, which, at least on Sundays, so many people frequent, a reality to us? Can we enter into it, and understand it, and profit by it? Now, it is not our object at present to enter into its history, or trace its compilation, or try and see what fragments of the past lie embedded in it—that has already been done in books, which are within the reach of all of us; but simply taking the service as it is, as we open the book, as we try to approach God in its order of prayer and praise, to ask ourselves, "What mean ye by this service?"

And at the outset we may find the investigation simplified for us, by the introduction which is prefixed to the service, wherein the whole is most carefully analyzed, that we may understand what we are about to do before we enter upon it. And we are there told that we enter upon the service, first of all, that we may render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at God's hands; that, in the second place, we come to set forth His most worthy praise; thirdly,

that we may hear His holy Word; and finally, to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul. Here is a fourfold division of the service before us—thanksgiving, praise, instruction, prayer. In a restless, bustling age like this, we are in too great a hurry, to read this Exhortation more often than we can help; but it may be doubted whether we do not lose something by its omission, namely, the clear setting before us of what we are about to do, when we come to do it, which shows us that if the Holy Communion is like the daily sacrifice, this, too, is like the offering of the morning incense. It is very important, therefore, to remember at the outset that the service proceeds on some method; that it is not a promiscuous conglomeration of prayer, instruction, praise, and thanksgiving, like the unpremeditated effusion of some disconnected mind. The service which we are considering, like all the other services in the Prayer-book, is a golden ascent to the golden throne, with broad steps, wide enough to carry the many needs, the many aims, the many offerings, of the multitude which throngs up them.

Let us try, then, and ascend in thought up these steps, and see how, each time we come

to Morning Prayer, we might, if we were faithful, go up by the royal ascent to the dwelling of our King in Heaven. And, of course, we come expecting to find Christ; and He appears before us, but not yet. He is expecting us, but we must wait; for the first message which the Church has for us is repellent: "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground;"[1] "Who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts?"[2] "I will not hear: your hands are full of blood;"[3] "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God."[4] Before the holy place, in the Temple, there stood a laver, in which the priests washed before they ministered, in whose shining surface they might see themselves, and note their defilements and stains, that they might purge them away. And so, before we enter upon our service, there is the laver of the General Confession waiting for us—quite general, worded in quite open terms. No special sin is mentioned, no actual defilement specified; but it is a mirror. We do see in its structure, which contains the water of abso-

[1] Exod. iii. 5. [2] Isa. i. 12.
[3] Isa. i. 15. [4] Eccles. v. 1.

lution, some reflection of what sin is; it is an error, a broken hedge, wilfulness, violation of God's Law, commission of evil, omission of good, an offence, a fault, the cause of our Saviour's death. If a man washes himself in this, if he accepts the words of power and pardon pronounced by the priest, he sees his sins reflected; and so far pardoned and washed, at least from all those sins of imperfection which might impair his offering, he is more ready to approach God, in thanksgiving, praise, and prayer; more ready to be instructed. And now he begins to approach God, in the Prayer of all prayers, the pattern of all others; and begs that the messenger of God may open his lips with the warm coal of devotion taken from off the altar. And then he ascends his first step, as it were, to thank God and to praise Him; and here the harp of David is put into his hand, and he takes upon his lips the inspired words of the Psalmist, in the ninety-fifth psalm—the prelude, the overture, as it were, containing the melodies, and the principal themes and motives of that which is to follow. And then the psalms of the day, one, two, or more, in a daily portion. This use of the psalms is very difficult, but, like most difficult things,

it well repays the effort. It is not instruction that we are listening to, but we are taking on our lips the inspired words of praise used by saints, and consecrated by the piety of ages. What a wonderful collection of psalms might be made, or of verses of psalms, as they were used and are used still by the saints in some great crises of their lives! We all remember that psalm, sung to the accompaniment of the sharp tension of the harp of the Cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"[1] or again, "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit."[2] We remember how Jacob in his trouble, and S. Peter in his earnest sermon, and S. Paul in his letters, all turn to the psalms. "If we keep vigil," says S. John Chrysostom, "in the church, David comes first, last, and midst. If early in the morning we seek for the melody of hymns, first, last, and midst is David again. If we are occupied with the funeral solemnities of the departed; if virgins sit at home and spin;—David is first, last, and midst. O marvellous wonder! Many who have made but little progress in literature, nay, who have scarcely mastered its first principles, have the Psalter by heart. Nor is it

[1] Ps. xxii. 1. [2] Ps. xxxi. 6.

in cities and churches alone that at all times, through every age, David is illustrious; in the midst of the forum, in the wilderness, and uninhabitable land, he excites the praises of God. In monasteries, amongst those holy choirs of angelic armies, David is first, midst, and last. In the convents of virgins, where are the bands of them that imitate Mary; in the deserts, where are men crucified to this world, and having their conversation with God;—first, midst, and last is he. All other men are at night overpowered by natural sleep: David alone is active, and, congregating the servants of God into seraphic bands, turns earth into heaven, and converts men into angels."[1] In old days it was the custom to preface and conclude the portion of the psalms with an antiphon from Scripture, or some holy words, to give the keynote, as it were, of that which was recited. But as that, unhappily, has been lost to us, cannot we each for ourselves antiphon the psalms with our own needs? Is not the daily melody of the Psalter, as it mounts up to God, the harmony of many wants, and many interpretations, and many hearts, all

[1] Quoted by Dr. Neale, "Commentary on Psalms," vol. i., Introduction.

saying the same words? Let us read our daily life, with its daily wants and daily blessings, into the daily psalms, and we shall be astonished to find how eloquent they are, beyond all that the heart can feel or fancy.

But where is Christ? Now we hear of Him, we have traces of His Presence; we have the shadow of His advancing majesty in the Old Testament Lesson read out of the Bible. In type and figure and symbol we hear of Christ. The sorrows and the aspirations, the faith, hope, and love, of the Old Testament saints, their longing for the promise, their patient waiting for Christ,—this is the message which the First Lesson gives to us. And then by a link of praise, whether in joining ourselves to the voice of the Catholic Church in the *Te Deum*, or to the hymn of nature in the *Benedicite*, we mount up again to hear clearer and more distinct news of Christ in the Second Lesson, which speaks to us either of Him, and His words and actions, or of the Apostles, or of Christian precept. And so we reach that which is really the culminating point in the service, where psalm, and hymn, and canticle, and lesson, Old and New, all converge—the *Benedictus*, that Gospel canticle in which we thank God for the

mercies and blessings of the Incarnation; that "He hath visited and redeemed His people;" that "He hath raised up a mighty salvation for us in the house of His servant David;" of this the prophets prophesied; this was the oath which He sware unto Abraham; this was the message of the forerunner; this was the message of salvation; this was the dawn breaking from on high, as no other dawn has ever broken before or since; "to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." From this point the service is easier; if we have followed so far, we can follow on. If God has helped us up to this point, He will help us up to the end. We have found Christ, as it were, in the service, and now we rejoice in His Presence. We profess our belief in Him, in that Creed consecrated by the piety of ages. We ask Him all things which are requisite for our souls and bodies. The particular teaching of the week is gathered together, as it were, in the collect for the day; then we pray for peace, and we pray for grace, for the Queen, for the Royal Family, for the clergy, for all sorts and conditions of men; and then, ending up with a prayer that God would accept not only our

petitions which we have so feebly put, but our desires which they have so imperfectly represented, blessed with the grace of the Triune God, we rise to leave the church.

What might not this service effect, if it were really and heartily offered by us? It might be of immense value to ourselves: no one could go back to the world without feeling better and stronger, with an increase of faith, hope, and love. It might be of real value to the Church: from this intercession might stream forth peace and grace and spiritual help. But it demands an effort from those who offer it—the complete gathering up of the understanding, the kindling of the affections, the concentration of the will. But, above all, there will be that earnest cleansing of ourselves at the laver when we come to offer; and then, with every part of our being concentrated and prepared, we shall make the service a reality, while early in the morning we direct our prayer to God, and look up.

II.

Evensong.

"Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense: and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice." —Ps. cxli. 2.

THERE is an old rhyme which comes down to us from the days of the Nonjurors, or at least from the dreary times of religious persecution and embittered controversy—

> "Be the day weary, or be the day long,
> At length it ringeth to Evensong."

There is a peace and quiet, a sense of repose and rest, gathered about the Evening Service which seems absent from the practical reality of the morning. The Morning Service breathes forth the stern resolute voice of the Christian going forth, in the Name of God, to meet another day's troubles, another day's work, another day's wants. The Evening Service has (unless it be a fanciful thought) a calm, a

hush, a peace about it, as of the wearied worker seeking a welcome repose. It is the disciple coming in to Jesus to tell Him what he has done, and what he has taught; it is the weary ones bringing to Jesus the long files of sick, and troubled, and palsied, and possessed, as the sun is setting; even more, it is the disciples following Jesus, Who, when the evening was come, went away into a mountain to pray. And so in the Evening Service everything partakes of this character. The thanksgivings are pointed by the thought of perils lately past; the prayers are quickened by the consciousness of mercies just received; the instruction is God's comment on the actions of the day; the supplications link on the mercies past to hopes for protection during the quiet powerless night, when none can work.

With some such thoughts as these in our hearts, we come to church, we enter on the service, we accept with meekness the reiterated warning, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep;"[1] "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings."[2] We are dusty and

[1] S. James iv. 8, 9. [2] Isa. i. 16.

hot and weary; we bend over that laver filled with refreshing water. It is no unmeaning platitude, "We have erred, and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep." The marks of the thorns, the scars of our trespass, are upon us—one day's defilements! We have been wilful and wayward; we have stained our robe, and torn our garments with many a rebellious sin. "We have offended." We see the cruel marks and the blows of sin—the sin of the day. "God is provoked every day."[1] "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done;" one more day wasted! "We have done those things which we ought not to have done;" another day misspent! "And there is no health in us." Who would recognize, in the tottering, fainting, bleeding prodigal, the soul that set forth fresh in its morning innocence? And we wash, and we are refreshed, as the words of priestly absolution fall upon us; and, cleansed and purified from the dirty stains of one day's struggle, the imperfections of one day's work, once more we prepare to meet Him. Once more we say the Holy Prayer; once more the cherub touches our lips with the warm coal of devotion; once more we grasp the harp of David,

[1] Ps. vii. 12.

and mount up the golden steps with the Psalter on our lips; and the memories of the day come sighing through its strains, like the wind playing upon the strings of the Æolian harp. The trials of the day are softened, the joys of the day are mellowed, the lessons of the day are hallowed, as they weave in and out of those holy strains. After some day of wrestling with sin, for instance, what peace comes wafted in on those words, "Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers"![1] After some day of fierce conflict and bitter struggle, like the ravens to Elijah, the message comes with its strengthening food, "The lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good."[2] We read of the Holy Spirit, Who "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered;"[3] and perhaps at times, when the heart cannot conceive, nor the lips frame the inmost longings of the heart, these words of the Psalter come to our aid.

And so we pass on to listen. "We wait for Thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 1. [2] Ps. xxxiv. 10.
[3] Rom. viii. 26.

Thy temple."[1] And once more Jesus Christ is projected before us from the pages of the Old Testament. The "patience and comfort of the Scriptures"[2] is the inspired Comment on the day. We have been moving in a fallen world, in an atmosphere laden with sin; yet, "Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in His fear, and was forsaken? or whom did He ever despise, that called upon Him?"[3] The trials of the day are useful; they are part of the afflictions of Christ bound up in the sacrifice of the Cross. See how He comes to us in type and shadow. The "scapegoat" takes before our eyes the shape of Him Who is the outcast of the people; the "brazen serpent" melts into the image of the atoning Cross; the lamb of the sacrifice becomes the Sacred Victim, Who opens wide to us the gate of Heaven. And thus we come on, until we reach Christ Himself standing between the Old Testament and the New. As the *Benedictus* was the summit of the morning ascent, so the *Magnificat* is the summit of the evening ascent. With Mary we magnify the Lord, our spirit rejoices in a Saviour; we

[1] Ps. xlviii. 8. [2] Rom. xv. 4. [3] Ecclus. ii. 10.

feel that we too are magnified, and that holy is His Name; and that His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations. The battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift. God hath remembered His mercy, He hath holpen His servant Israel; He hath remembered the promise which He made to Abraham; and "be the day weary, or be the day long," there is a Saviour Who will meet us at the end of it. "Thou art a Place to hide me in, Thou shalt preserve me from trouble: Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."[1] And then, as before, we sit to listen to the fuller, deeper message of the New Testament. Just as the disciples gathered about Jesus on the mountain-top, while He opened to them His treasures, or explained some miracle, or gave them some warning, or delivered some precept; so, in the calm evening, above the hum of the world, when the landscape is fading from our view, and the toil is past, and the quiet steals on over us, then the day assumes its due proportions, at His lips; its parables are unravelled, life's mysteries are cleared up, and another miniature life is finished. And, with Him, we rise to sing our *Nunc Dimittis.*

[1] Ps. xxxii. 8.

We are ready to depart, out of the busy day—yes, from life itself; for life is not wasted. It is no enigma, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." It is a light which lights even those who reject it; it is a glory to the faithful Israel, the Church. Then once more we praise God for simply being what He is; we express our undying faith in the Everlasting God. Once more we gather up our needs as in His sight before we turn to go; once more we bring before Him those who need His blessing; once more the Church's petition for the day is raised; once more we ask for peace, and for protection during the night; once more for the Queen, for the clergy, for the State, for the sick and dying; once more we pray that not only what we have asked for, which has been so imperfectly asked, but what we really desire, may be granted unto us; and, with His grace fresh upon us, we go out from His immediate Presence.

Certainly, if the morning devotions are the van-guard, the evening are the rear-guard, of the day. They protect what has been done well, and offer it to God. This evening devotion cuts us off from the haunting "wickedness of our heels"[1] before we lay us down to

[1] Ps. xlix. 5.

rest. And it always seems a touching prayer, which is put up for the clergy, and indeed for all, "Send down upon our Bishops, and Curates, and all Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of Thy grace; and that they may truly please Thee, pour upon them the continual dew of Thy blessing." Evensong more especially is the dew, and, we are told, "the hotter the day the greater the dew;" that those things which want it most receive it most—the tender grass rather than the hard roads; while even a slight cloud is sufficient to intercept it. So, upon those who want it most, the evening blessing falls most fully; upon the sick, the weary, the sinful, the sad. There is a calm in the service, a refreshment in the devotion, which revives the parched soul, and soothes the heart trampled down with the rough footprints of life. And so, again, the hotter the day has been, the greater the dew; the harder the temptation, the greater the peace; the hotter the struggle, the fuller the calm; the straiter the want, the richer the relief; the fiercer the pain, the gentler the refreshment in the healing of the day's pain. It is those who are weary and heavy laden who feel the peace of this evening

prayer. But a cloud will intercept it—one "earth-born cloud," born of frivolity, or carelessness, or indolence, or rebellion, or doubt. No dew falls then; only weariness and dull monotony. Oh, it is the old, old story; how much we miss out of the world, how much we throw away! "Comfort me!" the heart is crying out in her pangs; "Strengthen me!" "Soothe me!" "Forgive me!" And the message comes to us, with the voice of the church bells—

> "Be the day weary, or be the day long,
> At length it ringeth to Evensong."

But there are many weary, who never stop to listen; many tired out, whom it soothes not. Oh that we knew our blessings and our comforts! Oh that we knew, while we are tormented and not comforted, of Him Who so tenderly calls us to Him; of Him Whom our hearts might learn to know as *Christus Consolator!*

III.

The Athanasian Creed.

"He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God."—S. JOHN iii. 18.

THE recurrence of the greater festivals brings with them the recitation of the Athanasian Creed, when, at all events, it is forced upon the notice of those who may not hear it said at other times. And this Creed is a very important item in the Prayer-book, not only from its great doctrinal value and spiritual help, but also because it has had to bear the brunt, in recent times, of a determined attack, levelled not only at the doctrines which it expresses, but at its method of expressing them.

Before proceeding to examine the Creed and its bearing upon our spiritual lives, there are certain questions which seem to detain

us at the outset, and to demand an answer. Whence did this Creed get its name? What is its date? What is its use, its scope, and object? What are the reasons, if any, which could justify the suspicions and the hostility which it has evoked?

As regards the first of these questions, we may say almost with certainty that it is not called the Creed of S. Athanasius because it was drawn up by that great saint, but because it contains the doctrines with which his life and labours will ever be associated; just as we might talk of the Arian Creed, not meaning thereby a creed promulgated by Arius, but which contained the sum and substance of his belief; or of the Socinian Creed in like manner, not as containing necessarily the tenets formulated by Socinus, but the general beliefs of that sect; as, indeed, we commonly talk of the Apostles' Creed, not meaning a creed drawn up of necessity by the Apostles, but that which expresses the holy doctrines which they taught.

As to its authorship, various writers and compilers have been suggested, with this result, that with great probability it may be assigned to some Gallican writer in the fifth century. In our Prayer-book, its use is

confined to thirteen occasions in the course of the Christian year, securing what is practically a monthly recitation; its ancient use, from the seventh to the sixteenth century in England, having been daily; while in the first reformed Prayer-book it was assigned to only six festivals during the year.

The scope and object of the Creed appear to be these. It has two main theses, the first being as follows: "Whosoever willeth to be in a state of salvation, before all things it is needful that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith unless a man shall have kept whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance." Then follows a long parenthesis, as it were, illustrating and enlarging upon this topic. Next follows a declaration as to the necessity of believing the doctrine of the Incarnation: "Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ." This, again, is followed by a parenthesis, explanatory and illustrative, which takes us up to the end of the Creed. What the Creed sets before

us being this—the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, and the doctrine of the Incarnation, followed by the Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and coming to judgment of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So far all is clear, and few will be found to object to the enunciation of these doctrines in themselves. That which people have objected to are what are called the damnatory clauses—clauses of condemnation, or, as perhaps we should rather call them, monitory clauses, or clauses of warning. They are these: "Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." "He, therefore, that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity." "Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved." People say that this language is unwarranted, that it is uncharitable, that it is dishonouring to Almighty God.

If we look at this a little closer, we shall see that the proposition asserted by the Creed is really this, that a right faith is necessary to salvation. This, undoubtedly, is not a popular

doctrine. Men say, "I can believe that one who is a drunkard, or an adulterer, or a murderer, or a blasphemer, may lose his soul and be cast away; but not a man who does not hold the right faith. You are condemning half the race by saying so; you are consigning to perdition good people, innocent people. Such a creed is contrary to the law of love." Obviously, the subject is not an easy one, and therefore it will be well, before investigating the question any further, to satisfy ourselves first of all on this point: Does the Athanasian Creed in its statements, and more especially in its warnings, go beyond the words or the spirit of Holy Scripture?

Perhaps it is not too much to say that the very key-note, the foundation of the whole revelation of God to man, is just this, which appears to be the basis of the Creed before us —that a right faith is necessary to salvation. For this the Holy Scriptures were written, that we might *know*. It is the dominant idea of the Old Testament; it is repeated more emphatically in the New. It appeals to us, as the very postulate of a revelation at all, that there is a truth which it is necessary for man to know, and which God in His mercy has vouchsafed to teach him. That which is

written at the end of the twentieth chapter of S. John's Gospel might be written down as the sum of the teaching of the whole Bible: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name."[1] And if we look a little closer, we notice first in the Old Testament this fact, that the old dispensation is founded upon the assumption that a belief in the unity of the Divine nature was necessary for enjoying the Divine favour. A man was punished with death for idolatry by Divine command —a fact which stamps in the most visible manner the displeasure of Almighty God upon that which is an offence in a matter of faith only, not in connection with morality. And this, so far from being altered or modified, is a principle which is increased in the New, as will be seen from a comparison of these passages: "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath One that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day;"[2] or again, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not

[1] S. John xx. 31. [2] S. John xii. 48.

believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God;"[1] or again, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed;"[2] or again, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema;"[3] or again, in the answer of S. Paul and Silas to the jailor at Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house;"[4] or again, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned;"[5] or just one more, in those words which breathe the very warnings of the Creed, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."[6] But people may reply to this, "It may be that belief is necessary to salvation, but not this particular belief, with its turns, and twists, and subtleties of expression, and hard sayings." But here, at all events, honest members of the Church will be prepared to endorse the statement of the Eighth Article, that the

[1] S. John iii. 18.
[2] Gal. i. 8.
[3] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.
[4] Acts xvi. 31.
[5] S. Mark xvi. 16.
[6] S. John iii. 36.

doctrine of the Creeds, the Athanasian included, "may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." The doctrine of this Creed is the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, and the doctrine of the Incarnation; in itself, not a whit less simple than the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, but only drawn out more fully under the pressure of unbelief.

The Church at first basked and reposed in the sunshine of personal love for our Blessed Lord; but when His existence and Divinity were challenged, it became necessary to define and explain. Where will our most precious promises be found, if Jesus Christ be not truly God? How will His Death save us, if He be not the Son of God? How do we know that sin is vanquished, if we are not sure of the power of Him Who has conquered it? How can One promise to us eternal life, if He has not the right of admission conferred by His eternal Sonship? How can we listen to One Who says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,"[1] if we are not sure that we are listening to One Who is "very God of very God"?

But now let us examine this a little further.

[1] S. John xiv. 6.

Why is it that people wince under the assertion of this great doctrine? Why is it a matter of such importance, on the other hand, to assert that a right faith is necessary to salvation?

It is, after all, only a principle which we recognize every day. All truth has its damnatory clause appended to it for cases of neglect. Our life, our human life here, may depend on the possession of the right knowledge of the truth at the right moment. Let a man, for instance, sever an artery when no help is near; it is necessary to the salvation of that man that he should know what to do. Let him take a journey on the Arctic snows, or under the sun of equatorial Africa; again it is necessary to that man's salvation that he should know how to manage his health under these conditions. Let him be smitten down with some disease, out of the reach of doctors; the truth, the exact truth, it may be, is again necessary to save his life. And, further, you have only to suppose that you have instructed and equipped and done everything you can to furnish such a man with ready help, and he has despised and refused and wasted your help, so that you must say at last, "I must leave him to himself, for he

will not let me help him." So it is with our souls—our souls, which are most delicate, and liable to that terrible disease of sin. Christ, the Good Physician, knows what we want, and instructs us how to treat, how to use, our souls, and we neglect His instruction. Do we not thereby imperil their salvation? He knows that we have to pass by a difficult and dangerous road—"a barren and dry land, where no water is"—and what He tells us is not merely "so much information upon the highest topics, but conditions of moral and spiritual renovation which are not to be found elsewhere." If a man rejects this, he does it to his great peril. If he wishes to be saved, "above all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith," simply because that Faith contains the essentials, the supplies, the helps, the directions, for his journey through the desert of the world. And then, of course, in the end, wilfully to reject these helps, is to anger the All-holy God. "The wrath of God abideth on him," because he has persistently and wilfully and stubbornly rejected all help.

Surely, then, if we view the warnings of the Creed in this manner, they are not the impatient curses of an intolerant Church, in-

terpreting the whims of a capricious tyrant. They are, in the first place, the assertion of a law that truth in anything cannot be neglected with impunity; and that, secondly, to go on rejecting warnings is finally to anger Him, Who spared nothing, not even Himself, to give us these warnings and His help.

But still some will say, "How awful a thing it is to pronounce sentence like this! Why not leave it to Almighty God?" The answer is simple. The Church *does* leave it to Almighty God. No one is condemned, and no set of persons is denounced. The Church merely says eternal punishment, eternal loss, is the sentence for unbelief; but the conditions are in the hand of God. He knows the antecedents, the opportunities, the moral circumstances, of each one to whom truth is offered, and also the deprivation which they suffer to whom it has not been offered; and He judges accordingly. Every universal statement like this implies conditions; all such statements, for instance, as "Give to him that asketh thee," "Resist not evil," "Swear not at all," "Pray without ceasing," must be taken with due limitation of circumstance. So with these sentences of God's wrath. The principle laid down is, "This is the sentence

promulgated by God in His Holy Word, and this is the enunciation of the Church's faith in accordance with that Word;" but, at the same time, there will assuredly be many conditions, many cases of invincible ignorance, or defective teaching, or unfortunate bringing up, errors which cannot be termed wilful, which God Himself will reserve for His own treatment. But the Church cannot on that account relax her warning. The newspapers told us only the other day of a poor old woman who was wafted in an open boat across the North Sea, without rudder, oar, or compass, and who safely reached the shores of Norway, through a rocky entrance and shoal-bound fiord, where it would be pronounced impossible for a boat to live. We do not, therefore, henceforward say to all mariners, "Commit yourself to an open boat, use neither oar nor compass, and trust to get to land safely on the first coast which you see." No; we still say, "These are the laws of navigation, which except a mariner keep faithfully, he cannot be saved."

If the Church does not warn, God will surely require the blood of men's lives at our hand. If we refuse to say the Athanasian Creed from a spirit of false tenderness, we

cannot say, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men."[1]

Would that we thought more of this great importance of a right faith! How much depends on the use which we make of God's Holy Word! How much depends on the use which we make of the Church, and of those Sacraments which our Church does not hesitate to say are "necessary to salvation"! If this or that person had only been told! If they had only been brought to God! If they had only the grace of the Church to fall back upon! But as it is, alas! the lives of too many are a sad commentary upon those awful but true words, "Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ."

[1] Acts xx. 26.

IV.

The Litany.

"Hear the voice of my humble petitions, when I cry unto Thee: when I hold up my hands towards the mercy-seat of Thy holy temple."—Ps. xxviii. 2.

THERE are few services in the Prayer-book which have proved so helpful to devout minds, and at the same time few so difficult thoroughly to enter into, as the Litany. Its ancient use in connection with the Holy Communion, and its present use in the Ordinal, catch it up, as it were, into the atmosphere of the very highest devotion; its Sunday use binds it on to festivals; its Friday and Ash Wednesday use link it to the fasts. It twines the atoning life and merits of Christ round all the changes and chances of our daily existence. It recognizes the hand of God in everything that happens to us. And, therefore, perhaps the consideration of its structure will lead us more intelli-

gently to use it, and the recognition of its importance more diligently to practise the devotion of intercession which it implies.

The word "Litany" means simply supplication, and was applied anciently to those solemn processional prayers which clergy and people, at times of God's visitation, or in any crisis of special anxiety, were wont to chant as they went in procession through the streets, as a public act of acknowledgment of God's providence and a sign of a common need. Traces of this may still be found in the Prayer-book, in the observance of Rogation-tide, the three days of solemn supplication before Ascension Day. Then afterwards, as this form of devotion became very popular, Litanies were not confined strictly to processions; they were used at ordinations, consecrations, coronations of kings and emperors, or dedication of churches. "A Litany never came amiss; it was particularly welcome as an element of office for the sick and dying. Its terseness, energy, pathos, seemed to gather up all that was meant by being instant in prayer."[1] About the eighth century, the

[1] See the introduction to the Litany in Blunt's "Annotated Prayer-book," as also for many of the facts here set down.

invocation of saints was introduced into the Litanies, which became afterwards such a feature of the later forms. But in the first Litany in English, drawn up probably by Cranmer in 1544, only three were retained—of the Blessed Virgin, of all holy Angels, of all holy patriarchs, etc., coming after the invocation of the Holy Trinity. These, in turn, were removed in the first reformed Prayer-book of 1549. The Litany of the Church of England is not, therefore, an exact transcript of any ancient form, but, although owing its origin probably to Cranmer, is made up in many parts of material gathered from other sources, of which there would be plenty to hand.

There have been sundry small rubrical alterations in the different services of the Prayer-book as to the time and manner of its use, its recitation at present being confined to Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and other days commanded by the Ordinary; a special place being also assigned for the officiant, as is to be seen in the Commination Service, where it is ordered, "Then shall they all kneel upon their knees, and the priests and clerks kneeling (in the place where they are accustomed to say the Litany)

shall say the fifty-first psalm." So Bishop Cosin says, "The priest goeth out from his seat into the body of the church, and at a low desk before the chancel door, called the fald-stool, kneels and says, or sings, the Litany." And in this humble position it has been usual to trace an allusion to the words of the Prophet Joel, "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?"[1]

The Litany may be divided into five parts: the Invocations, the Deprecations, the Obsecrations, the Intercessions, and the Supplications.

In the Invocations we appeal to each Person of the Blessed Trinity, each truly God, each with a separate gift and blessing for us. In the Deprecations we pray to be delivered from various forms of evil, and among them "deadly sin" and "sudden death," round both which expressions no little controversy has formerly raged. The distinction into deadly and pardonable sin, if it is stripped of all

[1] Joel ii. 17.

adventitious colouring, has a commonsense basis, which cannot fail to commend itself to any conscience which knows what sin is; while "sudden death," although there have been instances (notably, for example, of a great bishop in modern times) of men who have wished their end to be sudden, to the majority of mankind must always be fearful and full of danger. For few are so fitted by life's discipline to meet God, that they can venture to enter His more sensible Presence without the retreat of a death-bed. After the Deprecations come the Obsecrations—those petitions which are based on this principle, "that every several act of our Blessed Lord's mediatorial Life has its appropriate saving energy." And therefore the frequent "By" in the prayer is not a mere call to God to remember His work of redemption in each several act, but as if each were replete and instinct with its own grace; while here, and right on to the end of the next division, there is one long act of devotion offered to our Blessed Lord, which makes us wonder how one who once was a bishop in the Church of Christ could say that "the whole spirit and the general practice of our Liturgy manifestly tends to discourage" such

worship.[1] The fourth part, or the Intercessions, contains prayers for the Sovereign, the Bishops, the Lords of the Council, the Nobility, the Magistrates, for all people, in all their needs and necessities. Here and there an antiquated word, such as "affiance," meaning "trust," or "kindly fruits," meaning "fruits after their kind," may meet us; but as the wants are the common wants of humanity, so are the expressions easily intelligible to those who are in need of God's bounty. Then come the Supplications, which in prayer and humble petition carry us on to the end of this service of petition and suppliant intercession.

The Litany, in thus linking our wants so closely round the majesty of God, and bringing our everyday needs so conspicuously under His immediate providence, presupposes on our part a firm belief in the direct intervention of God in all that concerns our life. By Him kings rule; to Him the widow does not cry in vain. The lightning and the tempest, the issues of life and death, the mysteries of sin, the sorrows and the sufferings of man, and the fruits of the earth, which are to

[1] "Liturgy" is here used, of course, in its wider sense, which would include the "Litany."

minister to his needs, are all a care to Him; His mercy is over all His works. Before we kneel down to say a prayer like this, it means that we have made up our minds that God hears, and that God knows, and that God loves; that He is no creature of an Epicurean fancy, Who sits aloof from man, in the enjoyment of His own self-sufficiency, unmoved, untouched, unthoughtful,[1] as the awful wail of this suffering world beats against the fast-closed door of Heaven. It is a prayer addressed to One Who has power to do all things, and the heart to listen to any petition, however humble. It is the petition of miserable sinners who deserve nothing, to Him Who is always more ready to hear than we to pray.

Neither can any one use a devotion like this unless he has first convinced himself that God waits to be gracious to us—until we have first made known our wants to Him. It is not a dishonouring conception of God to think

[1] Lucretius, i. 46:

"Omnis enim per se Divum natura necesse est
Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur
Semota ab nostris rebus sejunctaque longe;
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri
Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira."

that He thus waits; it is rather the sign of His tender thoughtfulness. When He might give without our consent, and press His bounties upon us without our desire, He first seeks the co-operation of our free will, and asks us to do our part in working out our own welfare. Just as the teeming earth waits for human labour, that it may yield its fruits; or the rich resources of the world are hidden away as the prizes of human invention; or just as man's health and wealth depend in a great measure, at least in many cases, on his own conformity to certain laws of health; so it is with prayer. Truth flourishes out of the earth—man does his part. And righteousness looks down from Heaven—God answers. It is the condition of receiving all good gifts; and he who would enter into the spirit of the Litany must know it and feel it—"Ask, and ye shall receive." While at the same time all prayer is subject to these three conditions: the hallowing of God's Name; the advancing of His kingdom; and the more perfect accomplishment of His Will, as in Heaven so in earth.

And besides the efficacy and the necessity of prayer, there is also stamped upon this service, as we have already partly seen, the

all-sufficient merits of the atonement of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Every action that He did, every suffering that He bore, endorses as it were in letters of blood the supplication which we offer. He who uses these words of earnest petition and deep self-abasement, feels that it is perfectly useless to fight with Amalek in the valley below, unless those hands remain steady until the going down of the sun. No human merit, no earthly forethought, no careful prudence, can deal with the throng of enemies, which press on, evil upon evil, sorrow upon sorrow, woe upon woe, without the strength of that atoning Blood, without being linked to the Cross.

> "Crosses grow anchors; bear as thou shouldst do
> Thy cross, and that cross grows an anchor too."

But perhaps, most of all, this service assumes that we who use it should not be altogether unskilled in that most difficult yet most blessed work of intercession. It is very comforting, yet very awful, to see how God sometimes commits into our hands the well-being and the good estate of others. Noah's righteousness delays judgment; Abraham can save a city; Lot may do the same. God deposits with us mercies for those who will not

stop themselves to ask for them—blessings which we are to receive and dole out to them. The Apostle of the Gentiles is won through S. Stephen; the Roman Prætorium through the imprisoned saint. Money and wisdom and strength are given to men to profit withal; so are leisure, opportunities, and the wish for prayer, that we may intercede. But here, again, a service like the Litany falls down like a weapon too heavy for us to lift, a bow strung too tightly for our strength, unless we have learned to intercede. Intercession is not, cannot be, an easy task; it means coming between God and a certain course of action, or a certain method of dealing with men. He who intercedes, asks God in effect to turn aside and look at the earnestness and the goodness and the claims of the intercessor. And who is sufficient for these things? Why should God hear my prayer, that He would avert punishment from some offender, or stay some awful judgment, rather than listen to the claims of justice and the stern voice of retribution? Who am I, that I should venture to come between God and His justice, or seek to avert the course of His great Will? Intercession cannot be omitted, neither can it be lightly

undertaken ; it is a real work which is imposed upon us. And the Litany breathes the very spirit of intercessory prayer.

Certainly, if we believed more, and loved more, and tried more, we should not find the Litany so difficult a devotion as it is ; for here we have brought before us, and put upon our lips when we approach God, several things which our indolence might tempt us to neglect—prayer for others, prayer for ourselves, a consecration of all life's joys and troubles, by bringing them, one by one, before the never-wearied tenderness of God.

V.

The Holy Communion.

"They will go from strength to strength: and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion."—Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

WE now reach that central light, the rays of whose splendour find their way into every part of the Prayer-book. We may have already traced the Eucharistic gleam in the daily collect which is carried each day from the higher service into Matins and Evensong. The Litany is brought out in its full splendour only in its ancient Eucharistic connection. Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, Holy Matrimony, the Visitation of the Sick, the Burial of the Dead, even the stern Commination Service of Ash Wednesday, either move in their orbits round it, attracted by its central influence, or sparkle with borrowed jets of Eucharistic flame caught from its

brightness. And here we may well pause. Not only is the mystery which the service enshrines so tremendous, but the actual service itself is sufficient for a treatise. It is as if one were entering into some magnificent cathedral of mediæval grandeur, where history and architecture and archæology all come forward to meet us, each with its claims, each with its contribution to our store of knowledge, each demanding precedence one of the other. So here, liturgiology bids us trace the outlines of primitive structure, history shows us the marks and scars of collapse and rebuilding, theology shows us the bright points of doctrine embedded in the structure, while religion shows us how the whole service converges upon the great Presence of God and the memorial offering of the One Sacrifice. No one can call it, again, a simple service ; it is arranged with minute care. Here is marble from the great rock, there gold from the deep mines, or wood from the waving forest. Now they are the words of Christ Himself, now they are the songs which Angels are said to sing before the throne ; now it is the voice of Holy Scripture, now it is the prayer of ancient liturgies carrying us back to the remotest past. Here is the spirit of the

great prayers of old, clothed in the rhythm of the purest English. It is no ordinary service, and the history of the English Church is built up into its structure, and therefore it is a bold thing to discard all the assistance which comes to our hand, and to use it simply as it comes before us, as our appointed method of communion with Christ. Sometimes in the noble cathedral such as we have imagined, we shut our eyes to architecture, history, beauty of form, and symmetry of detail, and throw ourselves upon its great conception as the house of God. So now, while at other times we gladly trace the marvellous history and singular liturgical beauty of its constituent parts, let us simply try and throw ourselves into the spirit in which it presents itself to us, as an act of the highest worship which the creature can offer to its Creator.

If we ventured to describe the services of Matins and Evensong as a graduated ascent, by a golden staircase of prayer and praise, much more so shall we find this to be the case in the service before us. For just as the material fabric of a Christian church is arranged, with steps leading up by degrees to the Altar; so, if we wished to describe the

Liturgy as it is put before us in the pages of the Prayer-book, we could hardly denote its character, *viewed in the light of the assistance which it gives to the devout communicant*, in terms which more fully emphasize its meaning, than in calling it "Steps to the Altar." That is to say, the Holy Eucharist is a service which contains a great climax; the central point, that around which all the solemnity gathers, which is enshrined, as it were, in casket after casket of rich workmanship, and surrounded with every circumstance of reverence and awe, being the Prayer of Consecration, as it is called, in which, after calling upon God, and solemnly using those words of institution which the great High Priest, at the first Eucharist, taught the priesthood which He left behind Him ever afterwards to say, the celebrant imparts, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, that inward part to the outward sign, which results in the spiritual benefit and refreshment of the soul to the faithful recipient, and thus becomes a fulfilment of that gracious promise to the Church, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen,"[1] in the Blessed Presence of the Altar.

[1] S. Matt. xxviii. 20.

That is the point up to which all else leads; this is the point from which all others spring; it is in this way that the Church is able to carry out the Lord's command, "This do in remembrance of Me," and to convey the fulness of His Eternal gift, "The Bread that I will give is My Flesh, which I will give *for the life of the world.*"[1]

With this idea of union before us, leaning into the very Presence of God, let us approach the service itself. We have come into God's house, bearing upon the multitude of His mercies; to Him we have worshipped towards His holy temple. Nothing has been allowed to come between us and the glory of our purpose. We have really and in a literal way been to look for the kingdom of God and His righteousness; we have lingered on our knees waiting for His holy guidance in the midst of His temple, each with our own needs and possibilities—each, it may be, with some form of pain and suffering like the multitude which of old lay around the healing Pool of Bethesda. And the celebrant comes on his ministry, with the words of his service, and after his private prayer of preparation, he commences the service in prayers which give

[1] S. John vi. 51.

the keynote of our devotion. The Lord's Prayer reminds us that we are about our Father's business; and the prayer for purity, that we must "come holy and clean to such a heavenly Feast, in the marriage-garment required by God in Holy Scripture, and be received as worthy partakers of that Holy Table."[1]

And now we are all kneeling, as it were, at the lowest step; we are all waiting, in lowly abasement, for our call to draw nearer to the Great Physician. And the first words which greet us are words of warning; one by one the commandments are read out to us—the moral laws of the kingdom of God. After each we are bidden to say in heartfelt devotion, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law;" and each commandment comes to us articulated with the burden of our own self-examination and confession, the sense of having offended in each particular giving point to the prayer for mercy and amendment. After this we are bidden to advance a step forward, as it were. Our general wants as citizens of a nation are expressed in a prayer for good government; our particular wants as a Church in the

[1] Communion Office.

collect. And then we receive a distinct encouragement. A message is conveyed to us from the King in the Epistle; the royal assurance of pardon and love in the Gospel, which all receive with that reverence which is due to a royal message, standing upright upon the feet, and uttering an acclamation of thankfulness. And now once more we mount a third and distinct step. We have owned our need of mercy; we have come forward to state our general and particular wants, as citizens and Churchmen; we have been encouraged by the Word of God—"Where the word of a king is, there is power;"[1]—and now we come forward to express our belief in God. Like a child who is beginning to gain confidence, we are encouraged and soothed by the tenderness of God, so that we all join together in the strong, helpful words of the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one God." The God of history, the God of the Gospel, the God of the Catholic Church, is my God. "This God is our God for ever and ever: He shall be our Guide unto death."[2] Then, by a rapid ascent, we pass from confidence to boldness. We make an offering to God; we have the opportunity of offering to Him of our substance, in the

[1] Eccles. viii. 4. [2] Ps. xlviii. 13.

form of money, and in the form of the materials of the Sacrifice, the bread and wine which are now placed upon the Altar; these are offered to God in a prayer of deep intercessession "for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth," in which the dead are not forgotten, "that with them we may be partakers of God's heavenly kingdom," when the day of judgment shall have opened the gates to those for whom Christ has purchased this blessing by the shedding of His most precious Blood.

But at this point, as if to warn us not to be too bold, we are urged to pause, once more to consider our sins and imperfections, and the great dignity of this Holy Mystery; not once, but twice, we are positively warned on this point, and we are not allowed to come any further without first kneeling down to confess our sins in words of lowly abasement: "We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty of God; . . . the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable." And then, as the assurance of this our repentance, the priest absolves us

with power from on high; and, as if to encourage us further and beckon us on, the "comfortable words" reassure our faltering penitence. Christ seeks out those who are in trouble; He loves to receive sinners and eat with them; He is our Advocate, our Propitiation. And so, leaving all thought of self behind us, our sins, our needs, our unworthiness, as S. John heard of old in the island, so we too hear a voice, which says to us, "Come up hither." *Sursum Corda*, "Lift up your hearts;" and we ascend another step, to find ourselves with Angels and Archangels, and all the company of Heaven; and we feel that we know now what is meant by *Eucharist*, as we say, by the mouth of our representative, "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks." And, with bowed head and humble heart, we join with Angels and Archangels, and all the company of Heaven, in the triumphal hymn to the thrice-holy God: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: glory be to Thee, O Lord most High." We now feel how very high we have reached in the ascent to the Altar; and, as if once more to help us to realize our position, we are bidden

to abase ourselves still further, and, in the beautiful words of the Prayer of Humble Access, supplicate that, unworthy as we are to gather up the very crumbs under Christ's Table, "we may so eat His Flesh, and drink His Blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood, and that we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us."

And so we reach the Prayer of Consecration—that great climax of all the service. We hear those awful words, "This is My Body," "This is My Blood," and, with a heartfelt and distinctly uttered "Amen," we give our assent, as it were, to this great act of sacrifice; we lay our hands on the head of the spotless Victim, slain once for all on Calvary, Who is now in Heaven, and on earth mystically offered for us—"the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world." And we kneel in adoration and wait in supplication; we gather all our energies of devotion about us—there is no attitude but kneeling, no voice but prayer; we think of our own wants, the needs of the Church, the parish, the nation; we bring before God our friends, and all that need His wide com-

passion; and then, when our turn comes, we reverently seek the Altar; we kneel down and stretch out our hands to receive that blessed Food—"the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for *thee;*" "the Blood . . . which was shed for *thee.*" In that great moment of world-embracing love we stand as single individual souls before Him.

> "Thou art as much His care, as if beside
> Nor man nor angel lived in Heaven or earth:
> Thus sunbeams pour alike their glorious tide
> To light up worlds, or wake an insect's mirth:
> They shine and shine with unexhausted store—
> Thou art thy Saviour's darling—seek no more."[1]

Then, returning to our seat, we can say with Mary, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. . . . For He that is mighty hath magnified me; and holy is His Name." And still, while others are receiving, the time seems all too short for communion with Christ our Saviour. And then we are reminded again by the Lord's Prayer that our life is only one, out of many thousands; we are but a member of a congregation, and a child of His holy Church. And so, in prayer and thanksgiving, with the angelic hymn ringing in our ears—

[1] "Christian Year," Monday before Easter.

"that hymn which began in Heaven and ended upon earth"—we prolong our time of joy and gladness; we linger on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is good for us to be there. And as we turn to depart, God's peace and God's blessing prevent us on our way.

And should not the skin of our face shine as we leave that Presence? Should not men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus?

Never let us forget the thanksgiving which should stay our footsteps before we mingle once more in the world. We are ready enough to ask, but often too chary in giving thanks. If we did our duty more in this respect, our love would be deepened, the grace would be more lasting. We should realize, perhaps, habitually what has been said of a first Communion: "Heaven itself is but a first Communion, which lasts for ever."

VI.

Holy Baptism.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."—TITUS iii. 5.

THE services for Holy Baptism, of which there are three in the Prayer-book, carry on the very surface the traces of the great importance which the Church has always attached to this rite. With her Lord's command ringing in her ears, with His Holy Word in her hands, she knows it is no exaggeration to say that Holy Baptism is "generally necessary to salvation," both because, by the power of that Holy Sacrament, the entail of original sin is broken off in its taint and malignity, and also because those who before were alienated from God receive the adoption of sons, and mystical union with Christ, which enables them to partake of grace. It is nothing short of the gift of a

new nature, making us capable of Divine grace. And so we find its effects thus described in the services before us. It is a washing and sanctifying with the Holy Ghost; a deliverance from the wrath of God; a receiving into the ark of Christ's Church; a remission of sins by spiritual regeneration; an embracing with the arms of God's mercy; a gift of the blessing of eternal life; a participation of God's everlasting kingdom; a bestowal of the Holy Spirit; a being born again and made heir of everlasting salvation; a release from sin; a burial of the old Adam, and raising up of the new one; an enduing with heavenly virtues; a mystical washing away of sin; a regeneration, and grafting into the body of Christ's Church; a death unto sin, and a living unto righteousness; and finally, a putting on of Christ.

Now, the Church of England was evidently very anxious that the service in which Holy Baptism was administered should be much further-reaching than merely to affect the recipients, and those immediately connected with them. The opening rubric tells us that "the people are to be admonished, that it is most convenient that Baptism should not be

administered but upon Sundays, and other Holy-days, when the most number of people come together; as well for that the Congregation there present may testify the receiving of them that be newly baptized into the number of Christ's Church; as also because in the Baptism of Infants every Man present may be put in remembrance of his own profession made to God in his Baptism." So that, in investigating the service, we shall probably find that there is much that will speak with solemn voice to our souls, and that, so far from being a waste of time to be present at such a service, it might be, if we entered into it, a source of spiritual edification.

We are met at the outset with the significant place in which Baptism is administered, at the font, standing generally near the door of the church, to signify that this Sacrament is the means of our entry into the Church of Christ. Here the child is brought, with those sponsors who undertake the promises and vows which the child is too young to make, or who witness the earnestness of those who are able to make them for themselves; and after due assurance has been given, to prevent any sacrilegious repetition of a spiritual benefit which can only once be given, the solemn

introductory service takes place, in which the god-parents and friends of the child are warned of the exceeding greatness of the privileges which they have come to seek; and God is invoked to receive and bless, and admit to His full favour, the child now brought into the church. Baptism, they are told, is necessary to salvation, and that, further, they must join in prayer with the minister, that God would bestow that supernatural gift, whereby our old nature is taken away and the fulness of grace bestowed, and that the child now to be baptized may be received into Christ's Church, and be made a lively member, instinct with all the life of God. And so the prayer mounts up to God, that the same Power which saved Noah by water, and Israel through water, and which consecrated water in the river Jordan, would apply spiritually all these blessings to the child now brought to God; wash him with water, bear him upon the water, bring him safe through the water to the promised land of Heaven. And then God is besought for the child's helplessness, his sins, his outcast state, that He would receive him as His own child. And the god-parents are encouraged by the Gospel of the children, and bidden to

thank God ; and so the child is received, as it were, as a candidate for Baptism.

Then follows the second part, the ancient "Baptismal Rite" of the Church. The sponsors must do their part on behalf of the child; and it is not a little important that those who thus come forward to claim God's mercies for others, should themselves be those who try to keep those promises which they undertake for their god-children; men and women who are not condemned in their own hearts by the sense of guilty yielding to those sins which they are promising that others shall renounce ; who do not wince, out of a stubborn heart of unbelief, when they profess on the part of others an unhesitating belief in the Catholic Faith; who are not struck by an awful sense of incongruity when they say, "I will," in promising to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life.

A solemn duty is laid on god-parents to be themselves what they promise their god-children to be. To see that the children are gradually led on in the right way up to Confirmation, and at least to pray for them; laying aside their responsibilities, it may be, when the child knows right from wrong;

laying aside their watchfulness and interest, *never.*

Close upon these vows of renunciation, belief, and obedience, follows the rite itself, with its three features—the blessing of the water, the Baptism, and the signing with the Cross. The Benediction of the Font has always formed an important and distinct feature in Holy Baptism, and although not of absolute necessity to the validity of the Sacrament, is a solemn invocation of the great power of God. "The Lord sitteth above the water-flood: and the Lord remaineth a King for ever."[1] The baptism itself is administered either by immersion or affusion, the symbolism in immersion—the dying unto sin, the being buried with Him by Baptism unto death, and rising again unto newness of life—being more complete. And then it is that the name is given to the child; the name that he will bear for ever, to shine in everlasting glory, or to be branded in everlasting contempt. Henceforth the child is, as it were, a distinct personality in the court of Heaven; he is known by name to the Good Shepherd. Henceforth he is certified that God has some blessing in store for him—for God

[1] Ps. xxix. 9.

never gives a name or alters a name without conferring with it some blessing; and that blessing now is a new nature. Henceforth the child will ever be reminded of his duties and promises. A Christian name brings with it Christian obligations.

And then follows the signing with the Cross —that solemn dedication of the child to the service of the Crucified; a token to all the powers of evil that gather round, that henceforth no one can really touch him without his own consent, for he bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus; a token also to the congregation that the child is now received into the Church, and admitted to the congregation, by a ceremony which does not take place when Baptism is administered in a private house in time of sickness. The use of the sign of the Cross is very ancient, at least in the private life of the Christian. So we read in the second century, "At every step and every movement, going out and coming in, when dressing and putting on their sandals, at the baths, at the board when lamps were lighted, when they lay down to rest, when they seated themselves for their daily task,—whatever care of ordinary life engaged them, the holy sign was, as it were, by in-

cessant use, worn into their forehead." So again, "Do thou never go out without this word, and with this word form thou also the Cross upon thy forehead; for so not only no man meeting thee, but not even the devil himself, shall be able to hurt thee at all." And so the child receives for life that sign of his warfare, which life's troubles will burn more and more into him. Happy is he if he learns that great truth, "If thou willingly bearest the Cross, the Cross shall bear thee."

And the service then ends up with thanksgiving—the "Our Father" in its usual post of honour; the humble acknowledgment of God's mercy, in regeneration, adoption, and incorporation with His Church; and the prayer that the child, being dead, may now live; that, being buried with Christ, he may hereafter rise and dwell with Him for ever, and be an inheritor of His everlasting kingdom. Once more the God-parents are admonished; once more reminded of Confirmation, which is to be the complement of Baptism; and the service is over, and the child enters on his Christian life.

Such was the service which was said over each one of us; such was the privilege which we received, and such the vows which were

made in our behalf. Is there no memory still lingering in our soul of that baptismal birth? There is still the grace which remains as a reserve of strength in many a conflict with our foe; still the grace which we may stir up in order to reach some greater height of virtue, which had been inaccessible without it. Only have our promises been sincere; have they been faithfully and earnestly kept? Do we "renounce"? Do we "believe"? Do we "keep"? Have we remained dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness? Are we faithfully bearing the Cross, or are we ashamed of the Crucified? It is sad to look back on life sometimes, and see what we might have been, and what we are. To see the great rents and seams which disfigure our life, which mark where sin has made its ravages, and raise a living protest against our broken vow. To see how want of faith has altered the symmetry and fulness of our life, and want of obedience has brought us into the snare. But just as a clever artist can beautify the careless daub or the faulty stroke by some fresh conception or design, harmonizing all in the completed work; so God, even when we spoil His plan and mar His designs, works our very mistakes into an altered but har-

monious whole. Our life bears on its every part the impress of the love of God ; but as often as we assist at this service, and see a fresh soul going out into a new and as yet unsullied life, it is a solemn call to each of us to bewail our manifold shortcomings, and our divergence from the freely imparted grace of God.

VII.

Confirmation.

"The doctrine of Baptisms, and of laying on of hands."—HEB. vi. 2.

THE Service of Holy Baptism in its concluding words spoke of Confirmation as the natural complement of its precious gift, and therefore a consideration of the Confirmation Service will follow quite naturally in order, according to the principles of the doctrine of Christ laid down in the passage before us—"the doctrine of Baptisms, and of laying on of hands."

And the importance, and even necessity, of the rite is not to be measured by the short and simple service before us. Confirmation is no mere edifying symbol, or solemn dedication of opening life, or mere renewal or even taking up of baptismal vows; it is more. It is, as its name implies (a name given to it as far back as the fifth century), an ordinance whereby we are strengthened with might by

God's Spirit in the inner man. Just as the rising building has to be strengthened by the buttress, or the growing tree by being bound to its support; so the soul, now beginning to encounter the fierceness of temptation, the weight of God's discipline, and the weakness of self, needs a confirming or strengthening, a binding to God, an increase of spiritual grace. Therefore the grace of Confirmation has been held to be nothing else than essential to the full perfection of Christian life. In Baptism, it has been pointed out, the Holy Spirit worked on us from without. He made us to be born again; He built the temple. In Confirmation, He works from within. He comes to dwell in us; to impart the Presence over the mercy-seat of the soul; to dwell in us, and to be in us. Hence, just as in Ordination those who are set apart for the ministry receive a special gift of the Holy Ghost, so in Confirmation there is a setting apart, an ordination, as it were, of those who are in earnest for the special work of life.

As to the rite of Confirmation in the pages of Holy Scripture, of course it must be conceded at once that it does not appear before us under this name, but under its second title of "laying on of hands," whereby it is in-

cluded, at all events, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews among the "principles of the doctrine of Christ." We find also in the pages of the Acts of the Apostles the Confirmation, as we should call it, of the newly baptized by the Apostles; while, looking at the inward grace of the rite as distinguished from its outward sign, perhaps we should not be wrong in tracing a reference to it in those words of S. Paul to Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost,"[1] where Baptism and Confirmation both are viewed on the inward side; while in the not infrequent mention of the seal, or the sealing of the Spirit, we probably have another reference to the characteristic working of God the Holy Ghost in this ordinance. So that Holy Scripture seems to represent to us Confirmation as a strengthening by the Holy Spirit, an unction from the Holy One, a sealing of the Spirit, conveyed by the laying on of hands by the Bishop. And if the so-called common sense of the day would seek to push past Prayer-book and Bible, and

[1] Titus iii. 5.

demand the worth of an ordinance which is tied to the imposition of a man's hands, then we are brought face to face with the principle of God's general dealings with man. We must ask Moses why he placed a serpent of brass upon a pole to heal those whom God could heal with a word. We must ask Joshua why he encouraged the Israelites to walk round Jericho, where a word from God would have laid the city low. We must ask Elisha why he sent Naaman to dip seven times in Jordan, instead of healing him straightway by the word of God. We must arraign the water of Baptism, and the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, as means of grace; and all human instrumentality whatsoever. Therefore Confirmation, with its outward signs, only fits in naturally with the general working of God's supernatural kingdom. And we may reverently believe that it formed one of those rites ordained by Christ Himself, when, during forty days before His Ascension, He spake with His Apostles of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

As to the actual Service of Confirmation, as we have it in the Prayer-book, it appears to be one of great brevity and simplicity.

We notice at once that it falls into two sharp divisions—the Renewal of Vows, and the Laying on of Hands. And it is a matter of no little regret that the first should have been allowed so very much to outweigh the second in the popular estimation of this rite. It is not too much to say that the Renewal of Vows, as such, has nothing to do with the essence of Confirmation; that it no more belongs to this ordinance than it does to any other equally solemn moment in a person's life. A child, for instance, renews his vows every time that he says his Catechism, when, in answer to the question, "Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do, as they have promised for thee?" he answers, "Yes verily; and by God's help so I will." So, again, it is a common experience in parochial missions for those who have been impressed, to renew their vows; and the fact that this portion of the service was only prefixed at the last revision shows the same thing—that it is only an edifying adjunct to ensure a better preparation on the part of the recipient. But its position in the forefront of the service is not an unmixed gain, as tending to perpetuate the error that the Confirmation candidates come mainly to con-

firm, or to take upon themselves their vows, or to release their god-parents from their obligations, rather than to receive the strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit, imparted by the laying on of hands, which, by their earnest protestation of renewed allegiance, they venture to claim from God. Certainly, if rightly understood, no one, on the other hand, will be disposed to quarrel with the order. For the Holy Spirit will not enter a heart which has not fully and entirely renounced the devil, the world, and the flesh. The Holy Dove will find no rest for the sole of His foot where the flood of sin covers the soul. Without faith, without that vessel of large capacity in his house, the Christian will not be able to take of the waters of grace. He must be more than moral; he must be a consistent Churchman. And equally with certainty, if there is one commandment habitually broken; through this rift, the grace of God will ebb away. It is for this, in order to ensure a more edifying reception of Confirmation, that the rite is postponed until the child is of age to say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and to answer the questions of his Catechism; until, that is to say, he is of an age to know right from wrong, and

of age solemnly to renew his baptismal vows, as at a great crisis in his life, and in renewing them to realize that to which he pledges himself. All this is set forth in the short exhortation at the beginning of the service; and, without more preamble, the Bishop solemnly asks each candidate if he is willing, before God, before the congregation, before Angels and men, to renew his vow, to give up, to believe, to practise. To which question every one who comes to be confirmed is bound to answer, "I do." It is a solemn moment. It is the oath of allegiance before being armed for battle. How sad, if in the end Satan gains the victory! How sad to break away from it! How sad to go back from it! And we too once said that "I do." How have we kept it? What have we given up? What do we believe? What are we doing? "Promise unto the Lord your God, and keep it;"[1] "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."[2]

And now we reach the Confirmation proper—the actual administration of the grace by laying on of hands. It commences with versicles and responses, leading up to a

[1] Ps. lxxvi. 11. [2] Eccles. v. 5.

prayer of invocation, in which God, Who once regenerated these His servants by the water of Baptism, and Who further has forgiven them all their sins, is implored to send down upon them the strength of the Holy Spirit, in all the virtues of His sevenfold gifts. Wisdom, which enables us to know the highest things; understanding, which is the Divine intelligence, the power of expressing wisdom; counsel, or the faculty of right choice; ghostly strength, which gives us the vigour of the saints; knowledge, in the well-stocked experience; true godliness, in the life guided by the sense of God's abiding Presence; and fear, which imparts to us the reverence of His majesty. With such a prayer, the spiritual atmosphere becomes charged, as it were, with the awe of that mighty approach. And as each kneels before the Bishop, the laying on of hands seals to him the mercy, the defence, of God's heavenly grace, and the daily increase, if he is faithful, of the Holy Spirit within him. Several ceremonies have here been dropped out—the anointing with oil, the signing with the Cross, the repronouncing of the Christian title, and the counterfeited blow on the cheek, to signify the buffeting that awaits the Christian at the

hands of the world, and the strength in which he must now go to meet it. But the laying on of hands conveys all that is essential. And whenever we are present at such a solemn time we should remember that we too have our part to play. A new recruit is being added to our number, the grace of God is being invoked, and the Holy Spirit is being bestowed, and at least we should help with our prayers. We ought not to chill the ardour of those who are but newly turning to God, by the cold indifference manifested too often by those who have already been recipients of the grace. And simply as it began, so the service ends, with the Lord's Prayer again occupying the place of honour, two collects, and the blessing. The little rubric at the end clearly shows the mind of the Church as to the necessity of Confirmation, and how the absence of it bars the way to the highest privilege, and necessary food of the Christian life.

A Confirmation time is one of those useful reminders which we should never neglect. This privilege has been bestowed on us, this grace is within us, that we may stir it up into a more living flame. We too were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, to raise us above

sin and nearer to God, capable daily of a higher grace. With God Who tries us in love, with Satan who tries us in hate, and with a flesh all too weak and yielding within, it was strength that we wanted. It was strength that we received. But temptation is terribly persistent, and our hold of God becomes loosened without constant use of opportunities (of which a Confirmation is one) of stirring up the gift that is in us, and unless, by a fresh resolution of the affections and will, we are constantly renewing the grace once given to us.

VIII.

Holy Matrimony.

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."—EPH. v. 31, 32.

IT can be little less than a shock sometimes to careless people, after, it may be, much light and foolish talk, amidst the bustle of preparation, the bright dresses, the arrival of guests, and the worldly excitement which attends a wedding, to come into church and hear, perhaps for the first time, the exceeding solemn—nay, awful—words of our Marriage Service.

There is hardly any rite of the Church which is celebrated in more solemn terms and in a more impressive way, because the Church recognizes in holy matrimony, not only the foundation of society and the stability of national power, but also, as S.

Paul's words show us, "a great mystery"—a Sacrament, as the Homilies call it, signifying the mystical union which is betwixt Christ and His Church; a solemn means of grace, whereby men and women are enabled to live, if they so will, according to God's laws, in perfect love and peace together unto their lives' end. For these reasons holy matrimony is a very solemn thing; and even more solemn when we remember that it is a union which is indissoluble, a union for life, a union of such a kind that those who enter into it are no more twain but one flesh, and the relations of the one become the relations of the other. And we are now reminded, at the outset, of two very cruel blows which have been struck against the sanctity of marriage in our land in recent times. The one is the Divorce Act of 1857; the other is the attempt, and happily as yet only the attempt, which is being made to legalize marriage with a deceased wife's sister.

As regards the first, it is quite clear that our Blessed Lord raised the law of marriage far above the standard of Gentile or even Jewish morality. Moses had allowed a bill of divorcement in certain cases; but Christ reaffirms, without exception, the original

law, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder;" while, in allusion to the Jewish Law, He rules that if an unacknowledged act of wickedness on the part of the woman had preceded the contract, the apparent tie might be dissolved—apparent in this sense, because in reality the contract was vitiated from the first.[1] The man married one whom he thought to be good and pure, who was not what he thought her to be, and in such cases the Jewish law allowed her to be stoned; and, in accordance with this theory, our Blessed Lord does not mention *adultery*, the term which describes the sin of married people, but He does use the term *fornication*, which describes the sin of the unmarried, as giving the one exception in which the wife might be put away. And although, in saying this, we must not forget that divorces of the nature of separation have always been allowed, on condition that neither the man nor the woman marries again in each other's lifetime, yet, on the other hand, we can never believe that divorce *a vinculo*, whereby the tie of marriage is said to be dissolved at the decree

[1] See Dr. Liddon's University Sermons, 2nd series: "Christ and Human Law."

of the judge of the divorce court, is anything else but a direct violation of the Law of God. Neither could Christians ever regard those who have contracted marriage after divorce as anything else but adulterers.

As regards the second attempt which is made to break down the sanctity of the marriage law, in the permission sought to be given to widowers to marry their sisters-in-law, it would appear that such a union would, again, be opposed to Holy Scripture, whether in the assertion of the primeval law, "They twain shall be one flesh," or in the restriction of the Book of Leviticus, where, apparently, it is forbidden by implication. It is further opposed to the plain precepts of the Church, as set forth in the Prayer-book; and it is opposed to the opinion of all those who have interrogated experience patiently and dispassionately, and who can trace, in the relaxation of the marriage law in the direction of affinity, the first step in a general laxity and looseness altogether.

Let us pass now to the consideration of the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, as we have it in the Prayer-book. The service is divided into two main parts, each of which again is subdivided. The first part, or actual

solemnization, takes place in the body of the church. The second part, or nuptial communion, with its preparation, takes place at the altar. And first of all we notice the great strictness with which marriage is protected. The Church enjoins, and the State enforces it by penalties, that no marriage be celebrated without public notice being given on three successive Sundays, or else by express licence from the Bishop, together with certain limitations of residence. Until quite recent times the hours for the celebration of the service were also limited to between eight and twelve in the morning—a provision of time which, apart from other reasons, is thought to point to the fact that the Holy Eucharist, which should not be celebrated if possible after noon, was regarded as part of the service, the meal which takes place afterwards being still called the breakfast. The Church has further imposed, ever since the fourth century, such a limit of time as to forbid marriage during certain times—as, for instance, Advent and Lent.

The service begins, as do so many of our services, with an exhortation, in which the objects of holy matrimony are stated to be three. One, the perpetuation of the human race, and the bringing up of children in the

fear and nurture of the Lord. The second, in order to avoid such sins as those for which the Canaanites were punished, and which still draw down God's wrath upon sinners. The third, in order to secure the mutual society, help, and comfort, which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. And then, as if again to show the solemn nature of the bond, and the irrevocable character of the union, the congregation are urged to state any just cause which may prevent the marriage; and in the most solemn manner the man and woman are bidden to confess if there be any impediment to their lawful union. "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful." Fancy these words said to those who have been the subjects of a divorce, or who seek to form an unlawful union, as brother and sister in law! They stand at the

very forefront of the service, as the unflinching testimony of the Church to the necessity of upholding, at all hazards, the integrity of the Law of God. Then follow in rapid succession three very solemn acts—the mutual consent, the betrothal, and the espousal. As regards the first of these, the consent, we must not regard it as a pure formality. By this action the Church wishes to assure herself that the marriage is one of free will, and with the ready consent of both the man and the woman; for forced marriages, alas! are not unknown, and against these the Church protests, as being as bad as clandestine marriages. How startling these words must sound, how solemn, to one who is marrying merely for money, or as a whim, or to satisfy some passing fancy, without any serious thought, or realization of its responsibility! How awful for a man or woman who deliberately marries any one whom he or she knows to be bad, without religion, without morality, without any reasonable prospect of God's blessing, or even without proper care and circumspection! For with this "I will" the consent is given to a life-contract, from which there is no turning back, where a mistake is irrevocable.

The second ceremony, the betrothal, used anciently to take place some weeks or even months before marriage. The minister receives the woman at the hands of her father or his representative (to signify that the father's authority over her is returned into the hands of God, Who gave it), and delivers her over to the man, in token that he receives her from God. After this there follows the actual espousal, first in the giving and receiving of a ring, which has just been offered to the priest for his blessing, accompanied by a solemn prayer; then in the solemn union by the Church, in those words which accompany the joining of the right hands, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and finally, in the proclamation of this union to the congregation, followed by the blessing. And so the first part of the service is concluded. Then follows the second part, commencing with the Nuptial Psalm, said in procession to the Altar, where the rest of the service is said, intended doubtless as a preparation for the Nuptial Eucharist, which the concluding rubric of the service seems to imply should follow immediately after.

Now, such a service as this is a heritage and blessing in itself. It would be little

short of disastrous if this were in any way injured or depraved by the laxity of the times. Its provisions, its words, its solemnity, as long as they remain, are a perpetual protest against any lowering of the marriage law. And, after all, national laxity is only the sum total of individual carelessness. Like the fog which hangs over our great cities, and which is darkened and thickened by the several chimneys as they pour into it their several contributions of sooty defilement; so public opinion is but the floating influence, suspended over the lives of men, made up of the individual lives which go to form it. We all of us can do something to influence it. Individuals brought about the Divorce Act; individuals are trying to bring about the permissive marriage with sisters-in-law. Therefore, if laxity and corruption proceed from individual sins, let the good example which is the saving of the nation proceed from individuals also. We all can do something to stem the tide. Within the circle of our own hearts, we can carefully watch and see that no evil is brought in unawares by our negligence. In our homes we can see that we maintain the purity of home life, which has hitherto been the pride of the English

nation. In choosing our companions, in reading our books, in ordering our newspapers, in the amusements which we frequent, we can maintain a high tone, remembering, after all, that it is the character of the demand which influences the supply. In dress, in behaviour, in the ordinary conversation of life, we can all maintain the integrity of a pure life. A nauseous revival of the sins of heathendom, without their virtues ; an effeminate æstheticism, very opposed to robust English common sense ;—all these things need watching and confronting. While as regards marriage itself, let us see to it that we always treat it with respect. Let us think what it signifies—the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church ; very different to the light, ill-advised, or even wanton union of those who, after all, must be companions for life, yet cursed with irreligion, hampered with carelessness, or blighted with sin, without God's blessing asked or received. Let us think of the solemn responsibility of marriage, of fatherhood or motherhood, of the position and duties which it involves. Let us think of the virtues which it postulates ; the love, forbearance, tenderness, self-denial ; the losing of one's own life in the life of

another. Let us think of Christ's blessing on marriage at Cana, by the sanction of the first miracle which He wrought. Marriage is a holy thing, as this service will proclaim even sternly to those who enter lightly upon its solemn ceremonies. The warnings of God are explicit, and the blessings of God are explicit too. Sodom and Gomorrah in ashes, and the Canaanites extirpated from the land; the last words of the Bible, and the shattered greatness of the Roman Empire;—all these are stamped with God's woe upon His broken laws. But His blessings, too, centre round what we may call "the home commandment," and His promises of a happy life are still realized to those "who fear the Lord and walk in His ways." If we betray our national character, our private and domestic character is still left to us. Let us see to it, as far as lies in our power, with all our might, that marriage be "honourable among all men."

IX.

The Office for the Visitation of the Sick.

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord."—S. JAMES v. 14.

THIS service, coupled with the short form for the Communion of the Sick, was undoubtedly designed to occupy an important place in the Church system. It is, apparently, all that remains to the Church of England of a rite which was once dignified by the name of a Sacrament amongst us, and is designed still to be a definite means of grace, whereby Christ, in the person of His Church, is present to heal the sick, if that be in accordance with His Will, to comfort them in their pains, to soothe them under the sense of sin, and to remove the burden of their guilt, and to calm their fears in the immediate presence of impending death.

Much stress has ever been laid on the

clergy visiting the sick. Our Blessed Lord Himself was always ready at all times to come from His solitude, or His rest, or His intercourse with God, to postpone what seemed to be the immediate business of the hour, that He might heal the sick and minister to their wants. "Heal the sick that are therein;"[1] it is one of His charges to the seventy. "They anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them;"[2] it is their answer to His command. So S. James says in the passage quoted above, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord." The same advice is also given generally in Ecclesiasticus, "Be not slow to visit the sick: for that shall make thee to be beloved."[3] While the same advice, given at various mouths, both of individual writers and of councils, is gathered up very precisely in the sixty-seventh canon, which orders the attendance of the minister or curate, in cases of dangerous sickness (with a curious reservation), to instruct and comfort the sick person; while, in the Ordination of Deacons, it is stated to be part of their duty to search out the sick and poor in the parish

[1] S. Luke x. 9. [2] S. Mark vi. 13. [3] Ecclus. vii. 35.

in which they are appointed ministers, and to give notice of such cases to the incumbent; while the priest, by his ordination vow, has a special duty of ministering to them laid upon him also.

As to the service itself now before us, it is one which has been used, with slight alterations, in our Church from the earliest times. "Nearly all the rubrics and prayers are to be found in the ancient manuals of the Church of England, and some of the prayers can be traced to almost primitive times."[1] The portions which have been altogether omitted are, the preliminary procession of the priest and clerks to the sick man's house, saying the seven Penitential Psalms, the antiphon of which, "Remember not, Lord," alone remains; and further, and more important, the anointing with consecrated oil—a form for which was, however, given in the first reformed Prayer-book, but omitted afterward, in the second book, and never restored.

The service, as we have it now, may be divided into two main parts, and an appendix. The first of these being the general comfort of Christ conveyed to the sick person through

[1] See Introduction to the Office for Visitation of the Sick, Blunt's "Annotated Prayer-book."

the Church; the second, a kind of renewal of the baptismal vows, as at a very solemn moment in life, coupled with authoritative pardon and restitution of the sinner on his earnest confession, and a general preparation for what may be his impending death; while the third division, or appendix, is made up of four prayers (none of which are ancient)—for a sick child, for a person when there seems small hope of recovery, a commendation of the dying, and a prayer for one troubled in mind or conscience.

In looking at this service, we must bear in mind that it is a solemn formal rite, not to be used lightly, or even frequently, over the same sick person. It is not a compendium of prayers for the sick-bed, on which the priest may draw, as he would from a book of devotion, or pastoral visitation. The priest using it would do so after consultation, and some sort of preparation with the sick man; he would vest himself as for a service of the Church, and, in old days, would have taken with him at least one server, or clerk.

Now we may see how the service, which is put into his mouth, shows the priest that he is coming as the accredited ambassador of the Church, and messenger of peace and consola-

tion. When he enters the house, he says, as our Blessed Lord bids him say, "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it." He is instructed to go on with prayers, which all supplicate for relief, comfort, and strength, a proper appreciation in the sick man of the meaning of sickness, for his repentance, and sanctification of sorrow, and a happy issue out of all his afflictions, either in death, or in amended life. And then, after this, gentle soothing and consolation. The second part begins in a more definite and solemn strain, showing that this sickness must be utilized, and taken in good part, accepted as coming from the Lord, and by no means to be let slip. So words of exhortation are put into the priest's mouth to this effect: Everything comes from God, health and sickness, strength and weakness, every change and chance of life, whatever it be; and for whatever cause the sickness comes, whether it be to try the sick man's patience for the good of others, or to correct him in his own person, if he bears it patiently, if he repents, if he is thankful to God Who sends it, it will turn to his profit; if he faithfully bears the cross, the cross will bear him. And therefore the sickness is to be taken patiently

and cheerfully, without losing any of the benefits with which it is charged. And in order to give point to these thoughts, it is best that he should remember his profession made in his name at his Baptism—recall, in fact, his baptismal vows, which seem now to resolve themselves into two great divisions, faith and practice; and therefore, in order to see whether his faith stands sure, the priest rehearses to the sick man the Apostles' Creed, as was done at his Baptism, "Dost thou believe in God"—in all that is involved in that belief? To which he is instructed to answer, "All this I steadfastly believe." While as regards practice, seeing that he is very ill, that he may be even dying, that his sickness may be sent to punish him; instead of barely renewing vows against the devil, the world, and the flesh; instead of vaguely promising to keep God's holy Will and commandments, he is bidden to put himself right before God in this way. The minister examines him whether he repents him truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world, exhorting him to forgiveness and amendment, to practise justice towards his fellows, restitution towards all, generosity to the poor; he must remember all this; and now as regards himself:

he is to be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter; after which the priest is directed to absolve him, if he humbly and heartily desire it, with the ringing outspoken words of full absolution.

And here it is to be noticed that we have what is perhaps the most characteristic recognition of confession and absolution in the Prayer-book. Before the Holy Communion, a man is invited to seek this help—he may come to it, if he cannot otherwise quiet his conscience; here he is to be *moved* to a confession of his sins, that he may obtain a particular absolution. It is the same power which is exercised by the priest in the daily Matins and Evensong, and in the Holy Communion; but there generally, after a general confession; here particularly, after a particular confession, and as often in other cases as a particular confession seems to merit it. And then comes a humble prayer to God, Who knows the heart, "begging Him to ratify His own act, and to declare that He hath done so by other testimonies of His favour." Then follows a psalm, with an antiphon, "O Saviour of the world, Who by Thy Cross and precious

Blood hast redeemed us, save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord," followed by two benedictions, to seal and confirm the abiding power, peace, and comfort of Almighty God.

One or two thoughts may suggest themselves as we study this solemn service. What comfort, pardon, and peace is here stored up for us in the Church—the very things we need in our sore trials and sicknesses! Just at the time when we are least able to help ourselves; when the sick body weighs down the mind, and the soul appeals piteously to its former helpers, and in vain; when the affections are terrified under the heavy hand of God; when the understanding is clouded, and the will feeble in its shifting resolutions; when the thought of abandonment and weariness and despair settles on the soul;—what a comfort at such times to have the strong, definite voice of the Church, with its acts of repentance, faith, and confession, to our hand! And yet how seldom this service is used! How few ask for it! How few seem even to know of it! It is not a little sad to find how negligent people are in sending for the clergy in their sickness; what little use they make of the special means of grace provided

for them. For there is no doubt that death is a very solemn and most difficult act; it is then that the soul will need all its strength; it is then that Satan will gather himself up for his final effort. We have lost the Holy oil—many lose the consolations that are left—of absolution, and the blessed food for the journey, which the Church is commissioned to offer us. And perhaps we ought also to remember (and this may account in some measure for the neglect of the service) that a rite like this implies a very high line of daily life. It means that these consolations now offered, specially and for a definite purpose, should have been sought for at other times, and in other crises of life; that repentance, and acts of kindness and justice, should not be unfamiliar acts, of which we now for the first time learn the meaning. If we tried to spend each day with God, and to make full proof of our Church blessings, it would be natural to us to use, at the moments of our greatest trial, those means of grace to which we had become habituated through the long course of a checkered life. In these days the people expect, and rightly expect, their clergy to visit them at their homes; but it may be, if they made more use of their visits for the

good of their souls when they were in health, they would be able more fully, and more intelligently, and more spiritually to appreciate this, which is not a luxury of devotion, but a necessity of this life, the visit of the priest as the representative of the Church, when they are sick.

X.

The Burial of the Dead.

"Devout men carried Stephen to his burial."—ACTS viii. 2.

GREAT stress has always been laid by Christians on the devout and careful treatment of the dead. Such a course follows naturally from the consideration of that article of the Creed which says, "I believe in the resurrection of the body;" or even more from that cardinal doctrine of the faith, that our Lord Jesus Christ, "for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man." The Incarnation has for ever dignified the human body. Further, we may say, it is involved in the reverence which we all must feel for the body, which we are taught to believe is the temple and shrine of the Holy Ghost. And so, accordingly, we find that reverence for the dead body appears here

and there in the pages of the New Testament. It is apparent also in the records of the early martyrdoms; for when the pagans had insulted and tortured to death the living bodies of Christians, they found they could inflict another pang on their friends by withdrawing their bodies from decent burial, or committing them to the flames. The same reverence for the dead meets us again in the Church of the catacombs. The tombs of the martyrs are the first Christian altars, where the living and the dead seem bound together in one communion and fellowship before the throne of God.

Now, while we consider the attitude of the Church towards the bodies of the holy dead, there are two things which strike us here in England about our churchyards. It seems to be a matter for regret, in the first place, that the large increase of population, and the inevitable lapse of time, have made it necessary to close so many of our old churchyards, and to remove them, in the case of new churches, further away from the church. There is something very holy and touching in the sight of the memorials of generation after generation of our fellow-men, now past and gone, lying round that church which had been

their mother in life. A church without a churchyard seems to have lost something—just that solemn fringe of quieting, sobering thought between us and the outer road of life. That dust of gold which lies buried in the consecrated earth, it is a link with the past, a help in the present, a hold on the future—those graveyards where the bodies of the blessed lie in peace, with their feet towards the dawn, waiting for the resurrection, to go forth with their shepherds to meet their Lord at His coming. Cemeteries are a necessity, but at the same time a loss, not sentimentally only, but in many ways, really, to the parish church. And another thing to be regretted is that recent legislation should have allowed our churchyards to be the scenes of services alien from and opposed to the church which stands so close by. No one wished to exclude those who had separated themselves from the Church in lifetime from the precincts of the church in death; our services could offend no one; neither could anything in the way of claim lie from those who in life had contributed not one farthing to the maintenance of the church or churchyard. It is sad to see such a holy thing made a cause of strife, where there was, and could be, no

grievance in the matter at all, and where now the signs of separation, which are bad enough in life, are brought forward even more prominently in death.

With reference to the character of the Burial Service itself, there is a reaction now against the gloom and pagan pomp of the funeral of fifty years ago. Our very churchyards resent the broken column, and the extinguished torch, and the emblems of irreparable loss, or the vaunting epitaph, as if the day of judgment were already anticipated in its verdict here below. Only let us see to it that we do not go into the other extreme, of too much brightness of flowers, and avoiding of all signs of mourning; or even of a light treatment of the dead. Death must always be an awful thing, in its separation, in its anguish, in its consequences to the body, and as the end of probation, and as a step nearer to judgment; let us fear lest there be some selfishness, some dislike to serious and solemn thought, differing in degree only from that steeled indifference to death, which, we are told, animated the captives herded together in the prisons during the terror of the French Revolution; who played with false and forced merriment, scarcely interrupting their game

when a fresh victim was summoned out. The door closed, and everything went on as before; there was only one player the less.

Having just glanced at some of the thoughts which gather round the burial of the dead, let us look now at the service before us in the Book of Common Prayer; and if many are quite unacquainted with such an office as the Visitation of the Sick, perhaps there are few who have not been present at some time or another at a funeral. And before examining the service at all closely, it is extremely important to notice the rubric which is prefixed to it, because it at once does away with objections which have been raised from time to time to certain expressions in the service. The rubric says the service is not to be used over three sorts of persons—those who die unbaptized, those who are excommunicate, and those who have laid violent hands upon themselves, or, as we call them, suicides. The service was designed, that is, for those who are made members of Christ in Holy Baptism; while those who were living in mortal sin at the time of their death, and had been cut off by the sentence of the Church from her privileges, were not to enjoy it; a privilege which was equally to be

denied to those who had committed self-murder. Hence there could be no impropriety in the expressions used over the dead body—as, for instance, when the body is committed to the ground "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life," even if these words had no other meaning than the one commonly assigned to them; or when we pray that we too may rest in God, "as our hope is this our brother doth." It would not jar then upon the feelings to say, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." The service was intended for those who had been living in full communion with the Church; but even now, when discipline is in abeyance, it is hard for man to be a judge, on the strength of his own private judgment, "before the time." Who shall tell? Who would have said, among those who saw the poor thief nailed to the cross, and writhing in agony, that he would that day be with the Lord in Paradise? We bury all in the hope of a resurrection to come, in the sure and certain hope that death has been robbed of its sting, the grave of its victory.

The Burial Service is a simple one, yet containing much that is beautiful and comforting. It commences with a solemn welcom-

ing of the dead body once more to the church, which it had known in life—unless some especial reason makes it necessary to go straight to the grave—by the priest and the clerks, saying, "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord," together with two other anthems setting forth the hope and the resignation which outlive death; and then, when all have come into the church, there is once more the comforting voice of the Psalms (the thirty-ninth and ninetieth), in which we bring our trouble before God, followed by a portion of the great resurrection chapter (the fifteenth of the First Epistle to the Corinthians), a portion of Scripture which has been used in the Burial Service from very primitive times. And it is after this lesson that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist takes place, whenever that service is used, according to ancient custom, at the burial of the dead. The rest of the service is now continued at the grave, and while the body is made ready for burial, the anthem is sung, made up of two parts, a portion being taken from the Book of Job, and the second portion from an old compline anthem adapted to this use, the original composition of which is traced back to Notker, a

monk of St. Gall, in Switzerland, who is said to have given utterance to it as he watched the samphire-gatherers hanging on the cliffs. The body lies there in death —God grant that it may not be delivered over to eternal death; for we acknowledge that death is a mark of God's displeasure, that it is the result of sin, that it ends in the bitter pains of eternal death, unless the most Mighty, Holy, and most Merciful Saviour deliver us. "Such words of penitence and humiliation on our own behalf, and on that of the person whose body is now to be removed from our sight,[1] are," it is beautifully said, "a fitting termination to the last hour which is spent in the actual presence of those with whom we have perhaps spent many hours, which need the mercy of God." Then there comes the solemn committal to the ground, the sacred sowing of the corruptible body, to spring up as the incorruptible, while the earth is cast upon it with all reverence, signifying at once man's nothingness, and the sowing of the holy ground. After this follows an anthem, and the Lord's Prayer in its usual place of importance, followed by a prayer to God, the God of the souls of the faithful departed,

[1] See Blunt's "Annotated Prayer-book."

thanking Him for the release of a brother from this world, beseeching Him for the fulfilment of the number of His elect, and for perfection of happiness for all who have departed, for all who linger behind. This is followed by an adaptation of the collect from the Funeral Eucharist of the Prayer-book of 1549, and the service closes with a form of the Apostolical benediction.

There is one thought that suggests itself at once. This service, beautiful as it is, seems to be more concerned with the living that remain, than with the good estate of the dead, over whom it is used. It is true that, here and there, a thought of them or a prayer for them is suggested. In the prayer which we were considering above, we pray that "we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of Thy Holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Thy eternal and everlasting glory." But there are few things in which we have to blame superstition, and false accretions to the truth, more than in this—that fear of error has driven away from even the most pious minds the thought and care for the holy dead which they have a right to expect at our hands, and which they experi-

enced from us when they were alive. If we carefully look at the universal testimony of primitive times; if we remember what the Jewish custom was at the time of our Blessed Lord, which is never once censured directly or indirectly by Him; if we remember the instance in St. Paul's writings of his prayer for Onesiphorus,[1] whose death at the time will only be denied from fear of a compromising concession to an unwelcome doctrine; if we remember the solemn words of the same Apostle, when he prays for the Philippian converts, that He Who had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;[2]—we cannot but believe that human instinct is right. And as the Princess Alice records in one of her letters after the death of her youngest boy, that "the eldest always prays for Frith;" so the practice of the unsophisticated child witnesses to the deeply rooted belief of the Christian heart, that death is but a separation, that we still all live unto Him, and prayer is the bond of union between us.

And there is one other thought that strikes us. Some day, in all probability, this service will be said over each of us. See, then, how

[1] 2 Tim. i. 18. [2] Phil. i. 6.

the Church treats death! See what its hopes are for us! See what its thanksgivings are, as it looks back over life from that higher ground of death! See how it treats our body as holy! See how solemn is the moment of death—a solemn parting, and a solemn meeting! Surely we should more often have those touching words on our lips, "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. . . . Of whom may we seek for succour, but of Thee, O Lord?"

XI.

The Commination Service.

"Neither shalt thou bring an abomination int thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing."—DEUT. vii. 26.

THIS service is only used once a year, on Ash Wednesday, although, by the discretion of the Ordinary (which seems, however, never to be exercised), it may be used at any other time. It seems to be mainly a form introduced at the Reformation, although primitive precedent for such a service is not wanting, and some of its constituent collects are ancient. It takes the place of the old Benediction of the Ashes, from the ceremonial use of which Ash Wednesday derives its name; and, at the same time, it appears to be peculiarly obnoxious to certain objections which from time to time are raised against its use. By some it is objected that it belongs more

to the rigour of the ancient Law than to the blessing of the Gospel; by others that it is a sorry thing to meet together in church and curse our neighbours, or, it may be, curse ourselves; while others find fault with certain expressions and unreal sentiments (as they deem them) contained in it—such as the approval of open penance, and the wish for the revival of the ancient discipline of the Church.

As to the first of these objections, perhaps we do well to remember that, even in this kingdom of life, the curses of God do still linger upon sin; that it is no rhetorical expression, but a stern fact, that "our God is a consuming Fire," and that the very greatness of our blessings involves a corresponding curse if we neglect them. We do not think enough about the dangers of our high privileges. We recognize this principle in dealing with the great forces around us. Steam is a strong power in the world, and blessed to the higher development of our material resources; but it has its curse if we neglect precautions in the use of it. The fire which warms us, and which supplies the motive power to our machinery, has its attendant curse if once it gets the upper hand.

Many of the modern appliances of science deal death around them if they are misused. There are, again, certain forms of disease, and certain aggravations of disease, which follow on civilization like weeds on the white man's track. We all know the solemn warnings gathered round the misuse of the Sacraments. And the Judge Himself, Who is Mercy and Love, has told us that one of His last sentences will be, "Depart from Me, ye cursed!" God, it is true, draws us by His blessings rather than terrifies us by His curses; but they are still there. We need only to look around us to see that, if it only be in that one fact of everyday experience—that although God may forgive, Nature knows no forgiveness for sins against her laws: curses follow sin, as effect follows cause.

As to the second objection mentioned above, we must remember that it is not we who curse, either ourselves or other people; we merely assent to the justice and awful condemnation of God against impenitent sinners, that we may be reminded of His great indignation against sinners, that we may be moved to an earnest repentance, that we may be enabled to flee from sin in the midst of temptations which threaten us; it is the read-

ing over, as it were, the list of crimes and punishments, and reminding ourselves of the certain penalties which are attached to sin.

As to open penance, the revival of ancient discipline, and the like—in the abeyance of all discipline we might reasonably wish for some. Whether it would be practicable to restore the ancient public penance, in the present state of society, may well be doubted; but we must remember that often grave scandal is caused to a congregation where a communicant or religious person falls into sin. He has sinned against God, himself, and his neighbour, and also against the congregation. And it is not unknown, even in the present day, that some sort of reparation has been made to the injured consciences of the congregation by notorious sinners, who have fallen from a position of good report; and it is not so very far back in preceding generations that public penance was exacted for scandalous sins—the principle of it being a reparation made to public opinion, which had been outraged by a public scandal; such a principle as we find again appearing in the opening rubrics of our Communion Office.

The remaining portion of the service does not call for any special comment. The

commination, which we have just been considering, is followed by an exhortation earnestly setting forth the danger and the malice of sin; and the service is ended with the humble recitation of the fifty-first psalm—that psalm where every word breathes the deepest penitence—and with prayers, all of which are couched in the same tone of deep sorrow and heartfelt contrition, and true purpose of amendment of life.

Now, it is clear and obvious to any thoughtful person that this service is designed, in its first conception, to deepen our sense of the true nature and character of sin. The curse of God is upon sin, and our inmost self can only answer "Amen" to the awful truth. And surely it is no unnecessary thing that we should sometimes pronounce clearly and openly that sin is an accursed thing. True, it is stamped on language, "sin" is the injury of the soul; "fault" is the crack and blemish running across it; "crime" is the awful indictment rising up against us, and the sin against society; "offence" is the blow struck against the majesty of God; "wickedness" is the utter perversion of the soul as by witchcraft. But have we not to deal, on the other hand, with all the cunning of Satan, who hides the

biting barb of sin under the clever contrivances with which he knows how to disguise it? He makes us acquainted with vice, for instance, amidst the absorbing interests of some carefully constructed work of fiction; and we become familiar with it dressed up in all the fascination of enticing circumstance. Or the passions are aroused by some drama whose tendencies are veiled under brilliant acting and lively music. Or Satan puts on the garb of a philosopher, and speaks to us about nature and human infirmity, and the like. Or he puts on the dress of a preacher, and says, "You are doing God an injustice. 'Ye shall not surely die.' You are mistaking for God's truth the savage conceptions of mediævalism." Or, alas! he carefully hides death under the whirl of pleasure, and men are engulfed before they are aware. There is a well-known story, drawn out with much horror of detail, representing a supposed incident of the days which succeeded the French Revolution. A certain physician in Paris receives people who apply to him to put them out of their misery in the easiest possible way. And he invites them to a dinner-party, resplendent with flowers and light and music, and everything to tempt the appetite, in luxurious

dishes and costly wine. But *every dish is poisoned.* It is an entertainment of death. Every one knew that which lurked under the forced gaiety which prevailed; that the end of that party was death. In like manner Satan's pleasures are all poisoned. So that the Church is only wise and thoughtful when from time to time she asserts in warning voice that they are accursed who do err and go astray from the commandments of God; when she strips off with unhesitating sternness the beauty and the gloss and the garish tinsel which dresses up the foul thing, and shows sin's blackness underneath. "Cursed is he that curseth his father or mother." Yes; Amen! The prevailing disrespect to authority can bring with it only a curse. "Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark." Yes; Amen! Might is not right, and fraud and extortion are base and ignoble. "Cursed is he that maketh the blind to go out of his way." Yes; Amen! It is but the voice of the loving Saviour Himself: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea." There is a terrible woe, too, upon false teaching. Injustice, treachery, adultery, cruelty, pride, hatred, lust, covetousness, slander, drunken-

ness, extortion,—all these clamour aloud for God's vengeance. And we ought to be thankful to the Church for telling us so, in all its bald and naked truth.

And that this service should be used in our parish churches, in the presence of those who frequent God's Altar, before respectable fathers and mothers, and sons and daughters, and not rather published in the streets or lanes of the city, is a startling indictment.

It is as when our Blessed Lord told that throng of people who had made themselves prominent as vindicators of a pure morality, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."[1] We are apt to forget that these sins, the most cursed of them especially, are roots of bitterness, which have long fibres, which may reach up into the very soul of any one, no matter who he may be, if he is not watchful. Satan does not care what instrument he uses, as long as he can damage the soul, and keep out God.

Holland was once endangered by the fury of an enemy, which swept down the banks, and let in the sea; but it was also imperilled by the work of a tiny little animal, which bored through the sluice-gates, and seemed likely to produce the same results.

[1] S. John viii. 7.

A silken thread stretched across the glass of a telescope will shut out the view of a star of some magnitude. Can it be that any of these sins are lurking somewhere in our hearts? Have we got any of those treacherous fibres twined with almost imperceptible tendrils round our souls? There is a long interval, apparently, between some coarse and painted woman who parades sin on the stage, and the delicately nurtured and apparently innocent girl who is looking on. But what if in her heart too there is that deadly root of fibrous bitterness? Religion flags; the leaves of good works fall off; weariness and selfishness and dreariness are there instead; the young life is gradually being choked by that stifling root. There seems a long interval between the forger undergoing a term of penal servitude, and the young man who when in difficulties first took a few shillings out of the till which he had lost in gambling, which he meant to put back, or has put back. But there is a great fissure open in his heart; the wall is broken down. Satan only watches and waits his time. The child of God has begun to hide himself from his Father, and the alienation will sooner or later become complete. There is apparently

some difference, again, between the coarse atheist who stoutly and wantonly affronts the majesty of God, and that perfectly respectable person, who treats religion with courteous regard, but neglects its precautions and safeguards; yet there is nothing so advantageous to an enemy as to be confronted by a paper army, and a phantom fleet, because it prevents, humanly speaking, any fresh measure of defence being taken. Our careless apathy is Satan's opportunity. And therefore, on no account, let us console ourselves by thinking that in the Commination Service we are merely cursing other people. It is rather that we are pronouncing God's curse upon ourselves, if we are harbouring in our hearts any seed, or root, or fibre of sin.

Satan does not always need coarse or striking sins for his purpose. He can kill some souls better by a hidden slow poison. If there is any sin lurking in the soul, it matters not what it is, there is a curse with it, and a curse upon it. Sooner or later it will cripple or kill us. And, alas! at that day, when blessings stand on the Gerizim of God, and curses upon Ebal from those who are doomed, we may hear that sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," and our heart, self-condemned, and all the people shall answer, "Amen."

XII.

Ordination Services.

"As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."—S. JOHN xx. 21.

THE subject which is opened up to us by these services is one which is altogether too great to be treated of in any way adequately within the narrow limits of an address. It might also occur to some that it is a subject which does not appeal to individual interests in the same way as many others which we have been considering, but to appertain rather to a class, and to a profession, with which the ordinary church-goer is not immediately concerned, in the sense of receiving the same instruction. A disquisition on the ministry may seem dry, or wanting in spiritual interest or personal application. It is quite possible that it may not be so interesting or so striking for us who sit at home to read of the

commissariat, and means of transport and supply, as it is to hear of deeds of valour and of arms from the army engaged at the seat of war; and yet, perhaps, if we were taking part in the conflict, we should know the intense importance of these questions as bearing on our very existence; so, while it may seem of more practical interest to hear of things which more immediately touch on the great questions of our spiritual life, at the same time there can be no question more important than that of the ministry, which affects the whole provision of our spiritual supplies.

Now, there would seem to be five main points set forth in the preface to the Ordinal.

I. That the three orders of the ministry are Apostolical, and have ever been held in reverent estimation.

II. That there are proper ages at which Holy Orders should be conferred.

III. That there are proper times and places for Ordination.

IV. That the candidates shall be duly tested as to character and qualifications.

V. That there are indispensable rites and ceremonies ministered by a Bishop for Ordination—public prayer, and imposition of hands.

A very high power, therefore, is claimed for the ministry. "The office and function of Priests and Ministers of the Church is appointed of God;" "Holy Scripture openly teaches that the order and ministry of Priests and Bishops was instituted of God, not by man's authority." The twenty-sixth Article says the clergy act "not in their own name, but in Christ's, and do minister by His commission and authority." So, again, in the Ember Day collect, we are taught to say, "Almighty God, Who of Thy Divine providence hast appointed divers orders in Thy Church;" and it is this that separates the Church from all sects whatsoever. The sects are bodies of people who have joined together because they think alike on certain aspects of religious truth. The Wesleyans, for instance, on spiritual religion; the Baptists on infant baptism; the Congregationalists on Church government. Just as temperance associations or political leagues are formed in the same way, to keep alive, to accentuate, and develop the different views which they seek to propagate. But the Church came essentially as it is now, from the hand of Christ. It existed in His counsels, as the oak in the acorn, to spread wider and wider by a fuller develop-

ment. First it appeared as Christ with the Apostles and Disciples; then the Apostles expanded into Bishops, or Angels, or Overseers; into Priests, or Bishops, or Elders; into Deacons, as the Church grew larger and more help was needed: that which is necessary to carry on the Church being a Bishop. He is the officer of the heavenly government sent by Christ; great care being taken in his consecration to keep up the Apostolical succession from Christ Himself—that is, through the Apostles.

"Christ is gone up; yet ere He passed
From earth, in Heaven to reign,
He formed one holy Church to last
Till He should come again.

"His twelve Apostles first He made
His ministers of grace;
And they their hands on others laid,
To fill in turn their place.

"So age by age, and year by year,
His grace was handed on;
And still the holy Church is here,
Although her Lord is gone."

So that a Bishop is necessary to the very existence of a Church. "The Bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the Bishop."

The subject before us, then, is evidently a very wide one, while enough has been said

to show its great importance, as being the authorized and appointed way in which the servants of the Church are commissioned and sent to minister to God's people.

In investigating the services themselves, we shall have to consider three: "The Form and Manner of making of Deacons," "The Form and Manner of ordering of Priests," and "The Form of ordaining or consecrating of an Archbishop or Bishop."

I.

In looking at the first of these—the form for the Ordination of Deacons—the lowest order in the Church, we notice that great stress is laid upon the character of those who are called upon to serve in this office. Not only has public attention been called to the person who offers himself in his own parish; but, again, at the day of Ordination, the Bishop urges any one who knows any impediment or crime against the candidate to say so. And we can see the great importance of this; it is not only that the unworthy minister will be doing violence to his own soul; it is not only that the examples of Nadab and Abihu, or Uzzah and Uzziah, overshadow with awful

warning the approach to the sanctuary; it is not only that Judas, the false Apostle, warns that nearness to the bright warm sun may mean destruction to those who receive its rays, not having any depth of earth; but there is also the great harm to the Church which is sure to ensue. People are only too ready to fasten on the office that which really is the sin of the individual, and "to abhor the offering of the Lord" which comes to them through polluted hands. And the thought of this solemn responsibility may well give increased earnestness to the Litany that follows, and to the prayer that special grace may be poured upon those who are to be ordained.

The Ordination itself, both of Deacons and the other orders as well, takes place in the service of the Holy Eucharist, of which it forms a part. The Bishop, having first asked them questions to test and prove their earnestness, lays his hands on the head of each Deacon, with these words, "Take thou authority to execute the office of a Deacon in the Church of God committed unto thee; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." And while he delivers to each of them the New Testament, he imparts to them this further commission,

"Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and to preach the same, if thou be thereto licensed by the Bishop himself." And here we come across the formal recognition of that difficult and important work of preaching, about which so much may be said, both on the part of those that hear and those that preach. Certainly, if clergy expect their congregations to receive their sermons as messages from ordained men, they must take pains to bring, like the wise steward, things new and old out of their treasure; they must study, they must think, and they must pray; they must go and take their message at God's hand, that they may afterwards impart it to the people.

But still the hearer has his duties too. The Bishop of Bombay has made the following weighty remarks in a late charge of his, which treats, among other things, of preaching: "When sermons are uninteresting or inadequate, whether the fault lies in the manner of the preacher, or in some want in him of intellectual grasp, or even in want of something else, which it seems that greater diligence would have supplied, I would ask you, my brethren of the laity, for whom we are called to live and work, to remember that, in

spite of all, the sermons come to you as a message from God. He might have sent another and a better preacher. He might have given the preacher greater power. If the preacher has failed to do his best, even that has been permitted by God, and so is part of His providence for you. And out of just the identical sermon which, in His providence, it has fallen out that you should hear, you can get some help, if you are listening for His words."

But preaching is not the only nor the main work of a Deacon. Activity, diligence, is the character of his ministry. It is his, above all things, to be the servant to bring from God to the people the tender sympathy and grace of the Church; to set the Priest free, by his activities, for the higher and more special duties of his great calling.

II.

The services for the ordering of Deacons and Priests, though distinct in theory, in practice are used together, as the rubric permits. And in glancing at the service which stands second in order—"the Ordering of Priests"—

we shall see even more to arrest our most earnest and serious attention. There is the same searching out of character and fitness as before; the same prayers for help; and a solemn charge, setting before those who come to be ordained their responsibilities, as messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord. Then follow the questions, which are even more searching than those addressed to the Deacons; the commendation of them all to the prayers of the congregation; the impressive silence, and the grand invocation of the Holy Spirit. And then the Ordination in words of mystery, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of His Holy Sacraments; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." This is followed by the authority to preach, and minister the Sacraments, accompanied by the symbolical gift of the Bible, in these words, "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the Holy Sacraments in the con-

gregation, where thou shalt be lawfully appointed thereunto."

Is this solemn service true? Is it real? Are, in very truth, such men, so invested, sent among us? Are such powers committed unto men who live amongst us and minister to us?

III.

But let us pass on and consider very briefly the last of these services—that for "the Consecration of Bishops." And there are three things which strike us there as distinctive. First, the solemn questions, as to vocation; as to right belief in and proper use of Holy Scripture; as to driving away strange and erroneous doctrine; as to the blameless life becoming one who must set ever the highest example; as to faithful discharge of the doctrine and discipline of the Church; as to gentleness to the poor and needy. And then, in the second place, the consecration, imparted in these terms, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Bishop in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. And remember that thou

stir up the grace of God which is given thee by this Imposition of our hands: for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and soberness." And then, in the third place, there is the solemn commission, symbolized by the delivery of the Bible, "Give heed unto reading, exhortation, and doctrine. Think upon the things contained in this Book. Be diligent in them, that the increase coming thereby may be manifest unto all men. Take heed unto thyself, and to doctrine, and be diligent in doing them; for by so doing thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. Be to the flock of Christ a shepherd, not a wolf; feed them, devour them not. Hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring again the outcasts, seek the lost. Be so merciful, that you be not too remiss; so minister discipline, that you forget not mercy: that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you may receive the never-fading crown of glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Surely these are very solemn services, and open up to us most serious considerations as to the ministry which God has placed over us.

Are we making any, or sufficient, use of this ministry? If these services are true, and

not mere idle forms, God has given to the clergy something which they, and they only, can impart to us—the Sacraments, and the means of grace. Are we using them, and profiting by them? If all that they could give us were that most obvious, and, indeed, greatest blessing to be obtained in the Church, the Holy Communion, here is a gift from above, put into the hands of His servants to give us, which nothing ever can make up to us, if we neglect to use it. Here, the thought strikes us at once, if we have ministers of the Sacraments, why do we not insist on their bringing to us food and help from God? Or, short of this, are there no difficulties in life, in the doctrines of His Church, in His Holy Word, in the mysteries of His providence, about which they can give us such assistance as it is their duty to impart? Has sin weaved no coil around our hearts which they can disentangle? Is there no help which they can give us, in sermons, in instructions, in their pastoral visits? "He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and He that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." Certainly it is the duty of the people to make every allowance for their clergy; to pray for them, to help them, to come to their help against the

mighty. It is easy enough to call to mind Aaron's sons, or Eli's sons, or Balaam, or Judas. But, if we call these sad instances to mind, let us do so determined to help those who are set over us in the Lord, that they may not fall in the same way. The people can help their clergy, as no one else can, to realize their sacred calling; they can encourage them by their presence, and help them by their prayers. It is for the people to show the clergy what they expect of them. It is for the clergy to respond to the call, and watch for the souls of those committed to them, as they that shall give account.